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VERNON







VERNON GROVE.





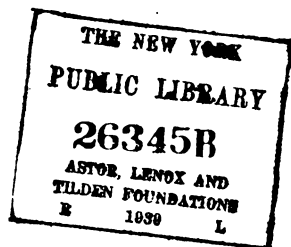
VERNON GROVE;  
OR,  
HEARTS AS THEY ARE.

A Novel.



NEW YORK:  
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EN



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**E. CRAIGHEAD,**  
Printer, Stereotyper, and Electrotyper,  
Carton Building,  
81, 83, and 85 Centre Street.

TO

J. R. THOMPSON, ESQ.,

THE ATTRACTIVE POET AND ADMIRER PROSE WRITER,

Who, from his own

GARDEN OF BEAUTIFUL CREATIONS,

Looked kindly upon

VERNON GROVE, A SIMPLE WAY-SIDE FLOWER,

THIS BOOK

Is gratefully Dedicated.



VERNON GROVE:  
OR,  
HEARTS AS THEY ARE.

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CHAPTER I.

"Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!  
Bright and yellow, and hard, and cold,  
Molten, graven, hammered, and roll'd,  
Heavy to get and light to hold;  
Hoarded, bartered, bought, and sold,  
Stolen, borrowed, squandered, doled  
To the very verge of the church-yard mould!  
Price of many a crime untold;  
Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!"—HOOD.

"Is she not passing fair?"—SHAKESPEARE.

ROBERT CLAYTON had but two passions in existence, two all engrossing impulses, love of money and love for his wife: into these all minor feelings merged; *they* were the broad vast ocean, the hungry, absorbing reservoir, while friendship, religion, joy, despair, hope, all that commonly affect mortals, were simply streams running towards that ocean in which they were lost; thus, to

glance from his gold into the bright and beautiful eyes of his wife, to seem to others but a hard, gain-loving man, and yet to her a fond and passionately attached husband, was aim and end enough for him while he ran the race for wealth and won it.

Let us look at him.

He has closed his door and his head is bent, while with pen in hand he draws mystic numbers, which to you or me are simply numbers, but to him a calculation involving the gain of many dollars, and he is alone.

There is no need to reiterate his command that while in that room, in no way resembling the others in his mansion, that cheerless, uncurtained room, in which are only papers, and maps, and a few books of reference upon the table, he may remain undisturbed, for the servants are too well trained to disobey an order once given, and in that lordly homestead there are no pattering feet of children to break the stillness, no fond childish cry of "father," no silvery tinkling laughter.

All is hushed! the man bending there over his fast-increasing black hieroglyphics, need fear no such intrusion and the calculation goes on bravely and well, while the look of interest becomes deeper and deeper; but at last, even while the calculator has unclosed his nervous fingers and grasped the empty air as though he were clutching a golden prize, some one has dared with sacrilegious tread to cross the threshold, to open the door of that sacred retreat boldly, and to stand unawed before the absorbed inmate, with smiling face, all careless of the mysteries within.

As the door swung open, a frown betokening anger passed over the brow of the slave of business, and he



laid down his pen with a gesture of impatience, but soon a smile, like the play of lightning over a gloomy sky, lit up his heavy face as he turned it towards the intruder.

How dazzling she was in the pride of her radiant loveliness! Nature had given her beauty, and art had brightened it, as a setting adorns a gem!

He drew her fondly towards him, baptising her, as it were, with a multitude of new and tender names, laid her little gloved hand in his own and looked almost incredulously upon it, as though it was the hand of a fairy, and not one which was his, his only; smoothed into place a truant wave of hair, praised her lips, her eyes, nay even with almost womanly interest her dress, from the fuschias which hung upon their trembling stems about her face, on through all the minutiae of her tasteful toilet, and then telling her playfully that he knew why she had ventured into his den, pressed upon her a handful of glittering gold.

But no, she came not for that, nor did she need it; she came only to bid good bye, good bye for a few hours; he might have missed her otherwise, she said smiling, as she looked up into his eyes as a star looks down upon an arid desert.

The hard face brightened; a face which had often turned coldly away from pleading poverty or the sick man's prayer. The good bye was fondly, lingeringly said, the bright beautiful form passed from the room and left it in comparative darkness, the heavy, absorbed look returned to the face of the calculator, while she, for whom it had brightened, passed on with light step through the winding passages, out into the noble corridor, along the line of pictures which graced her luxuri-



ous home, then into the sunlight without, which played about her as over some bright-feathered bird, and to the carriage which awaited her at the door.

"Drive quickly," she said in a tone which seemed accustomed to command, "or we shall be too late for the Exhibition, but first to my brother's."


The coachman obeyed, and the elegant equipage rolled noiselessly along the streets, attracting the attention of many a pedestrian by the perfect keeping of the whole; the silver mountings shone brilliantly in the sunshine, the dark green panels reflected the lights and shadows on their polished surfaces, and the steeds had that proud, almost conscious air, which betokens blood, and though spirited, were managed by their skilful driver with no unpractised hand.

"Happy lady," laughed a child of poverty, who with bare feet was pattering along the dusty highway, as she caught a glimpse of the coach and its occupant.

"Happy lady," echoed a weary toil-worn man, "what prevents *her* from being contented? God knows that to *me* riches would bring happiness."

"Happier child and laborer," said the invisible spirits of the air, "for you life has some object; your sleep is sweet; ye labor for an end; for her the only end is pleasure, and pleasure brings not peace."

The carriage stopped before a fine mansion, which in spite of its grandeur and perfect proportions was a gloomy one, for the closed windows almost betokened that it was uninhabited; but Isabel Clayton seemed at home there, as opening the door and shutting it again noiselessly, and then ascending the stairs, she knocked gently at the door of a chamber.



It was carefully unfastened from within, and a physician stood before her, who bowed and raised his finger warningly, as if commanding silence, and pointed towards the room which he had just left.

"Is the crisis passed?" she whispered somewhat anxiously, "is my brother out of danger?"

"Yes," was the answer, "I am happy to say that the crisis is past, and that I can pronounce my patient cured at least of his fever, but"—

The lady's little foot tapped the floor impatiently. "Your pardon, Dr. Bailey; let me beseech you to omit for once that ominous *but*; I really believe that that word is as necessary now to a physician as a gold-headed cane was in the olden time; it betokens all things, that your patient may live or die, that you mean to cure or kill him."

The doctor knit his brow as if doubting whether to endure so rude a speech, even from such rich rosy lips, but his time was so valuable that he simply vented his indignation in a quick impatient growl, and forthwith informed the visitor of her brother's condition.

"I was about to say, madam," he continued, "that Mr. Vernon no longer needed my services, but that the fever has left him totally blind."

"*Blind!* Merciful heaven!" said the lady, with a shudder; "that, indeed, is a misfortune; what will he do, think you, with his beautiful pictures, his statuary, his library, now that he can no longer enjoy them? But I am trespassing upon your time when I can learn all from his own lips. I can see him, may I not?"

"I suppose so,—yes, of course," said the physician rather doubtfully, hesitating as to the expediency of

admitting even a sister to his patient's room, "but as you value his well-being, do not broach any agitating subjects,—and above all, do not make a long stay."

This last warning was not needed; he might have spared himself the trouble of adding it.

The door opened once more and admitted Isabel Clayton to her brother's chamber, shaded almost to entire darkness by the heavy curtains and closed blinds.

"You are better at last, Richard," she said, taking one of his hands which was white and thin from long confinement, "the doctor has just told me so; need I tell you how rejoiced I am to hear it?"

"Thank you, Isabel; I hope that you have enjoyed your little pleasure trip; I am glad to see you here; no, I forget; I mean that I am glad to hear the sound of your voice; I suppose that Dr. Bailey has told you all, and that it is as superfluous as it would be painful for me to repeat it."

"Yes, it is very, very dreadful!"

"*Only* dreadful, Isabel?" he exclaimed, starting up and then sinking back upon the pillow with a sigh of exhaustion, "that is a calm, cold, meaningless word to express such an affliction as mine; why, a stormy day is simply dreadful, a headache dreadful,—why not have said the truth at once, that my life will be utterly useless,—really not worth the having!"

"Hush, Richard," said his sister, half frightened at his despairing mood and fierce reckless words, "you must look upon the other side of the picture; there *is* always a bright side you know" (it was a new thing for Isabel Clayton to moralize); "let me see; friends will

flock around you, of course, and the same hand that has closed your eyes to the beauties of life, has closed them likewise, you must remember, to all that is repulsive. If I had only time to think, I might enumerate many comforts which are still left you; but I have an engagement this morning which I must go to fulfil."

"What, so soon?"

"Now, Richard, any one hearing your querulous tone would think that I had been at your bed-side but one minute, when I can assure you that thirty minutes have elapsed since I entered; take care of yourself; I will come again soon, daily, until you are better,—and now good bye until to-morrow."

The sick man groaned aloud as she left the room. "This is the beginning," he said, "always and to every one a burden; if she, my sister, of whom I might have expected at least a semblance of interest, leaves me here desolate in a solitude which is almost madness, what am I to hope from others? Great heaven!—this is indeed a trial beyond endurance! It would be a mercy to take my worthless life, and I would yield it up cheerfully since the light in it is darkened for ever."

It was well that the prayer of that despairing heart was not regarded. God was merciful in another way, and spared his life,—perhaps for greater suffering and trial to prepare him better for the mysterious change which he coveted,—perhaps for some more than compensating joy.

## CHAPTER II.

*"Blind to the bright blue sky, the glorious sun,  
The mild pale moon, the vesper star's sweet blaze;  
Blind to the soft green fields where brooklets run,  
The hills where linger sunset's parting rays.  
Blind to the bright eye's most expressive beam,  
The cheek's rich dyes of beauty, and the form  
Whose symmetry might gild the sculptor's dream  
Of young Apollo, and his fancy warm."*

It was but too true. Richard Vernon was hopelessly, irrevocably blind. Weary of the world too he became, for his was not a spirit to sit with folded arms under its affliction, but like a caged lion to chafe against the bars which held it prisoner. Born in a luxurious city, proud, passionate, wealthy, his misfortune, when it came to him after a terrible illness, in which he hovered for days between life and death, made him suspicious, cold, and reserved. It was a double misfortune to him, who had educated his whole nature to the worship of beauty, seeking it in the minutest shell or flower, in the eyes of an unconscious infant as well as on the brow of a sculptured Titan, to feel himself stranded on a shore of darkness, where an eternal gloom took the place of the midnight stars, and a boundless blank replaced the smiling sunshine of the morn with only the memory of the beautiful to cheer him. His very wealth became at times a source of annoyancē to him, for, from his

gloomy brooding heart came thoughts of mistrust against those who had loved him when he could be of and among them, to pamper their tastes, and, who now sought from others the entertainment which he could not give. The gay crowd, indeed, among whom he had lived, wondered for a season, condoled and pitied, and even occasionally spared an hour from their pursuit of pleasure to cheer the lonely man in his solitary, darkened room; but Vernon felt, with the apathy of a man of the world, that the beauty, interest, and glory of life had departed, and that his dim apartment was no place for the butterflies of Fashion to fold their gaudy wings, and he soon wearied of visits which he knew were mere outward forms of conventional ceremony.

His sister, his only relative, gave him, it is true, what sympathy she could spare, and with her soft jewelled hand in his, told him of the outer life which he had been compelled to relinquish, sometimes of a new ball-room melody, to which, while she sang, she kept time with her restless feet, or of some new work of art in vogue, but even in her softly modulated voice he could detect a scarcely disguised desire to be in the sunshine once more, and freed from his querulous repinings. He remembered, too, what she was to that outer world, and how unconsciously to her the adulation that she met with there, together with the blind devotion of an indulgent husband, helped to foster her faults of character, the chief of which were thoughtlessness and selfishness.

But Vernon had one link still bright and untarnished, which kept him from total despair.

It is a truth that cannot be doubted, because so often

proved, that more powerful, more self-abnegating friendships exist between men than between women; indeed, among the latter there is often a frivolous semblance of friendship which the faintest breath of the world may dissolve, but when man grasps the hand of his brother man, either with open words and promises of truth, or a silent vow, almost the more powerful because unheard, unuttered, the bond cannot be broken, no strength can overcome the faithful grasp, no shock can sever the union. Voices around may whisper of unworthiness, the stronger is the tie; misfortunes may come, poverty, sickness, desolation, and the clasp is still firm and sure unto death.

Happily for Vernon, though so isolated, he had found such a friend in Albert Linwood, a young artist of great promise, who, though several years his junior, would steal away from an unfinished picture in his studio, to converse with or read to him from the books which he loved best; and many an hour, which spent otherwise, might have helped him on to fame, found him with Vernon, whose rebellious spirit was always calmer for his coming.

It was in one of these visits that Albert remonstrated with him upon the objectless life he was leading.

"Are you not weary," he said, "of these everlasting city surroundings? Would you not be happier, better, where the sounds are less harsh, and where you can feel that there are broader glimpses of the blue sky?"

"That word happiness," replied Vernon moodily, "has long since been blotted out of my vocabulary."

"And yet, if you will listen for a moment," replied Albert, "perhaps you would feel a sensation akin to it; for I might arouse you into something like action.

Leave the city for a while and take up your abode in some pretty rural place; the change would benefit you, I know, and you would soon realize the truism that God *especially* made the country; you will stagnate body and soul here."

Vernon interrupted his friend with a gesture of impatience.

"You seem to be leagued with the rest, Linwood, in trying to deprive me of even the few remaining pleasures which I have left; do you not see that I need some excitement to bear me up? Just consider my lonely position in such a place; I would scarcely ask *you* to relinquish your advantages here to come and cheer me,—Isabel would pine away and die in such a solitude, and other friends I care not to have. No, let me remain where I can at least hear an echo from the world which I used to enjoy so much; even in a reflected rainbow there are some gleams of beauty you know."

"And yet, here you are wretched," answered Linwood, earnestly, "all your fine qualities are beclouded, you are growing misanthropic and dreamy, and need a change. Trust me, Vernon, and listen to me; rouse yourself from this apathy, take a pleasant house in the country with extensive grounds, hire laborers, cultivate your fields, sow your gardens, and reap their fruit; do something; be anything but a mere clod; bring health back again to your frame by constant exercise and out-of-door life, and in the evening employ your servant, who has proved himself, in his capacity of attendant, trusty and intelligent, in reading good practical books, which will keep your mind awake and your knowledge of current events as thorough as before your blindness."



Linwood stopped for breath, for his zeal for his friend had quickened his usual measured tone, and the artist thought generally more than he spoke.

"Tell me when your Utopian sketch is quite finished," said Vernon, mockingly, and leaning back, apparently without interest, into a more comfortable position; but Linwood, not heeding the interruption, continued his exhortations.

"Then for me, you can fit up an artist's room, and I will paint your grounds, your hill-tops, and meadows, in pictures which might make me immortal, perchance, and though the city must claim me sometimes, Vernon, my country studio will be my real home. And *now* my story is done, as they say in the nursery books; this simple, rustic life may not exactly suit you, but I promise you one thing, that the result will be peace of mind."

"I own that you paint a picture with words as gracefully as you do with your pencil;" replied Vernon, "but still you must excuse me from being the principal figure in it, even though it have meadows and hills in the foreground, and peace of mind in the perspective. Excuse me, I shall do very well where I am."

"No," said Linwood, rising and speaking with growing earnestness, "you will not, and you know it; you know that each day finds you more restless than the last, and I sometimes think that even my favorite country plan will not benefit you; you need the tenderest devotion and care, you need a sister's sympathy and love, or finally, if I incur your displeasure for it, I must be frank and speak my mind, you need the watchful tenderness of a wife."

A look of intense scorn and incredulity passed over Vernon's face as Linwood thus spoke, and then breaking forth impetuously in a torrent of words, he effectually silenced Linwood's well-meant conversation.

"That would be something beyond the miraculous, the moment, I mean, when any fair, refined, delicate woman placed her hand in mine to follow a blind man's fortunes. Ah, Linwood, you have something yet to learn of human nature; where have you been that you have not heard that my misfortune has been the theme of conversation for a month, and how one fair lady has said that she pitied me because I could no longer use my glorious eyes in a flirtation; another, that she would, because of my affliction, lose the best time-keeper in the fashionable dances; while a third," and here Vernon's voice trembled and faltered, "while a third, who might have spared me such words and have been at least silent, whispered to a friend that though the light of my eyes had departed, I had not lost my fortune! If you can convert *these*, Linwood, into watchful and tender wives, women to love and cherish, you hold a magician's wand. But it may not be, my path in life is clear to me; blind, almost forsaken, poor amid much wealth, because not able to enjoy it, I must walk the hard, stony, rough road of life alone."

"And yet not quite alone," said Linwood, quickly, as he grasped his friend's hand.

"No, by heaven, there I was wrong," said Vernon, his voice filled with emotion, "forgive me, my friend, not entirely alone, thank God, under the light of your watchful eyes and guided by your faithful arm."

### CHAPTER III.

"I know a house, its open doors  
Wide set to catch the scented breeze,  
While, dimpling all the oaken floors,  
Faint shadows of the swaying trees  
Pass in and out like spectral things,  
Dim creatures born of summer light,  
Till through the deepening twilight springs  
A paler radiance of the night.

Across the broad unbroken glade,  
Which girds this house on either hand,  
The beach-clumps sprinkle showers of shade ;—  
These out-posts of the forest stand  
And guard the kingdom of the deer,  
The stillness of their charmed domain,  
Where Spring chimes matin every year,  
And Autumn leaves fall down like rain."

—MISS PARKES.

ALBERT LINWOOD departed from his friend's presence, disappointed that he had not succeeded in his endeavors to exchange his monotonous city life for a more varied existence, but a spirit so earnest as his had its reward, and Vernon, left to himself, pondered upon their late conversation.

Each time that he reconsidered the matter, it appeared more practicable to him, and sometimes almost inviting ; and in this world of changes, where some one has said that we are so different at different times that we could

write a letter, without any inconsistency, to "our dear yesterday's selves," it is not surprising that it all ended in Vernon's giving to Linwood full power to purchase a desirable residence.

This task the latter gladly undertook, and succeeded so well that after they had been established in the new home a few days, and Vernon seemed to feel as his friend had predicted, better and happier, he acknowledged that Linwood had indeed done all things for the best.

All his pictures and works of art were sent to ornament his new home, and every thing that had any claim to beauty in his town residence was removed to the country-seat, while many additions were made suitable to the style of the rural but elegant mansion.

It was pleasant, and yet touching, to see the interest that the blind man took in all that appertained to his present abode and the surrounding grounds; the pictures were all hung under his express directions, the furniture arranged with a view to his peculiar tastes, and even the little articles of *vertu*, which were beautiful, and numerous curiosities from all climes under the sun, were placed to suit his fancy; and then the outward details, which the last occupant had left uncared for, were minutely described to Vernon, who with a buoyant step and heightened color, would be seen directing the workmen, and the result was ever a happy one, for his taste, by practice and long experience, was never at fault.

Thus, if the change brought not happiness, it at least brought occupation, and Vernon, as he sat at evening thinking of his plans for the morrow, or what he had achieved each day, almost fancied that he had lost his

identity, so different was he from the Vernon who, in times past, had looked with contempt upon anything which savored of the retirement of the country.

Nor was Linwood's pencil idle, for the beautiful landscape around afforded him an incessant study, and he never wearied of gazing at the light and shade of the fine panorama.

In the front of the house there lay a well-kept lawn, almost English in its smoothness and verdure, which curved downward gradually until it was lost in the valley below. Trees of every variety decked this velvet carpet, sometimes in clusters, but oftener in solitary beauty, while in the vale below grew smaller shrubs, which disappeared as the depression swelled into an imposing hill covered thickly with forest trees, presenting from the mansion an ever-varied picture during each succeeding season of the year. Spring brought forth the tender budding green, summer the darker-polished foliage of the maturer leaves, while the autumn and winter phase each claimed admiration—the one, for the myriad shades and colors painted against the sky, the other, for the pure snowy drapery of the boughs, which rose mysterious and weird-like, like an assemblage of white-robed spirits watching silently over the earth.

On the right stretched a silver river, not so distant but that a passing sail might be seen occasionally upon its placid bosom, until lost in the shading woods; while on the left, and in the far distance, rose a mountain with its cragged blue peaks in full relief against the sky.

Nor must the rear of the house be left undescribed, for it was here that Vernon was most constantly occupied, and here a garden was laid out around an artificial

lake, whose waters ever kept the foliage green. Indeed, Linwood had chosen well for his friend, and Vernon would sit for hours listening to his praises of the location,—at morning when the sun first tinged the waters of the quiet river, at mid-day, when the artist's eyes would kindle at the flickered light and shade upon the mountain scene, or in the coming hour of night, when in the stillness they could hear the forest trees, touched by the evening breeze, whisper a farewell to the day.

But Vernon soon had another cause for anxiety beside his own life-affliction, for not many months had passed before he discovered that while *he* became each day more reconciled to his own changed situation, *Linwood* gradually seemed to grow weary of the contracted sphere. He had transferred to canvas all the striking views in the neighborhood with exemplary patience, considering that his forte lay rather in portraying the human face divine; but though he felt a weariness pressing upon his spirits, he made an effort, and partially succeeded, to conceal all appearance of ennui; but Vernon, whose perceptions seemed more acute since he had been deprived of sight, soon discovered the fact.

It seemed to display itself more after Linwood's return from visits to the city where he often went, and though Vernon deplored the change, after a severe struggle with himself, he determined no longer to keep his beloved friend and companion in a solitude which agreed not with his ardent and ambitious temperament, and it was then that he decided to offer him means to go abroad and to improve himself in the art which was the daily worship of his life.

When Vernon calmly told Linwood of his proposition,

little did he imagine that under that passionless exterior there was a struggle that it seemed almost impossible for the speaker to conceal; but Linwood's own heart was filled with such a glow of joy that it colored everything around with its own rosy hue, and he forgot for a moment the lonely hours that his absence would bring. He seemed floating in the atmosphere of a delicious dream; his life-long wish had ever been to go abroad, but the purse of a young artist who had yet fame to win was too scantily filled for him to entertain any such Utopian idea.

For a moment only, however, did he forget his friend in the brilliant vision which arose before him, for glancing at him to express his thanks, he saw, with dismay, what a contrast his face presented to the feelings which pervaded his own breast; and his refusal to leave him, his thanks for his generous offer, and the hope that he would forgive his momentary forgetfulness of Vernon's lonely position came in eloquent words from his lips.

But Richard would take no refusal; calmly they sat down to talk the matter over as he told him of his plans and portrayed the advantages which a study of the old masters would afford, until at last Linwood felt that to refuse his friend's generous offer would be unwise and ungrateful, and so, with a heart divided between joyful and sorrowful emotions, the hope of his life was realized; he was on his way to the land of his many prayers, the birth-place, the home, and the grave of the immortal painters of the past.

After the departure of his friend, Vernon turned himself more resolutely than ever to his plans for the improvement of his country-seat, and with his ever-watchful ser-

vant, made more extended excursions across the woods, which bounded his lands, into the more open country beyond. It was in one of these excursions, and almost before they were aware of it, that they suddenly found themselves upon the little domain which was occupied by the cottage of Mrs. Gordon, an aged lady, whose slender means, and whose inclination, perhaps, kept her a resident of the country, and it was here she lived in complete retirement during the whole year, with only her little grandchild Sybil for companionship, and an old domestic who daily became more incapacitated for labor.

A cup of cold water, asked for and bestowed, is often a prelude to a more extended acquaintance, and before many moments Vernon had gained several particulars of the history of his hostess, which was a very sad one, inasmuch as it included loss of property and the death of loved ones ; but Vernon's sympathy was still more enlisted by her telling him, after she had learned his name, that his mother and herself had been friends in early life, that they had shared the same apartment at school, and many an act of kindness on each side was narrated by her with an earnestness which interested Vernon, and acquainted him with several traits of his mother's early years. Vernon would have lingered for hours by the cottage door, but as twilight was approaching, he departed with his guide, after having promised a repetition of his visit.

Almost daily, after this incident, many comforts found their way to Mrs. Gordon's home, and the early friend of his mother became another object of interest to Vernon. The chance acquaintance ended, at last, with an




invitation from Vernon to Mrs. Gordon and the child to remove from the cottage to his own home, and for fear that the former might feel the obligation too great to accept, Vernon added, that she, in return, could be the superior of his household, and even extend her motherly care over him in his helpless blindness.

After much doubting and earnest thought on Mrs. Gordon's part, the change was made; but though she clearly saw the advantages of it, a hard struggle it became for her to decide in its favor, as she had long been attached to the humble roof under which she had lived peacefully for so many years.

But to the little child, particularly, who had grown at the side of her grandmother like the untrained woodbine over the casement, the prospect of a grand home, studied behavior, and the thought of the solemn aspect of the blind man, brought only tears. Each tree was dear to her, each flower peculiarly hers, for craving knowledge without having any instruction beyond the mere rudiments of book-learning, intelligent without the means of satisfying her thirst for information, her thoughts had been directed to the wonders of nature, and by patient investigation she had solved many a problem for herself, which a scientific naturalist would only have arrived at by long study and numerous books of reference.

With the birds her day began, and the rising sun found her guiding the tendrils of a pet vine, or singing among her own songsters of the wood; at mid-day, obedient to her grandmother's call, she learned her daily lesson, and the conscientious teacher imparted all that she could from her own slender store of knowledge.



The father and mother of the child had both been remarkable, the one for his bright, quick intelligence, the other for her beauty, which was exquisite, though she resembled the flower which blooms in the morning only to wither in the noon-day sun. Both lived for a brief season for each other, but soon found an early grave, passing to a better inheritance than brilliant intellect and beauty in another world.

Thus the poetry of Sybil's life was a legacy from those united spirits, and the prose a daily gift from the hands of her worthy grandmother, whose practical lessons of duty helped to give a balance to the child's character.

The last adieus were said, the grand equipage of their wealthy neighbor took them away from their vine-covered cottage, and all the world was bright and beautiful, while the woods were vocal with songs, but still Mrs. Gordon found herself checking a rising sigh, and Sybil, as she turned back to gaze once more with tearful eyes upon the beloved scene, felt that she had left her whole heart there among the pet birds and flowers of her fast disappearing cottage home.

Richard Vernon met them at the door of his beautiful mansion with a winning smile of welcome, which was brilliant enough without the light of his eyes, which in other days had beamed so brightly. The presence of the child, indeed, he scarcely noticed, except by telling Mrs. Gordon that she must have all her wants supplied; and Sybil, after arranging her little wardrobe and gazing from the window in her pretty apartment at the view of trees and the silver stream, hill, and glowing skies, felt bewildered and home-sick, and wished herself once more in her own low-ceiled room.

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Nor were things brighter or better in the little maiden's troubled heart when her grandmother desired her presence below ; with step, all unlike the bounding step of the cottage girl, she descended the stairs and sat demurely down, awed by the stillness of the great rooms, feeling very awkward, and scarcely allowing herself to gaze upon the beautiful pictures which adorned the walls, though in after years those very pictures became to her as household gods, and she knew each curve, and light, and shadow of their exquisite proportions.

And again at evening it was not more cheerful for the little stranger, as she sat in the damask-cushioned chair longing for her own uncushioned rustic seat, for Mrs. Gordon and her host monopolized all the conversation with their plans for the future, and so it came to pass that long before her cottage bedtime, Sybil fell fast asleep in one of the great armchairs, sighing deeply as the drooping lids at last closed tightly over her eyes.

Poor, little, lonely child, she was glad to find forgetfulness in sleep, for the feeling of home-sickness, when it comes to youth is a positive pain, dragging down the young spirit to unutterable misery, for which tears are sometimes a relief, but which is often too deep to be healed except by the comforting hand of Time. Many prayers are sent daily, hourly, from suffering, or pitying, or sympathising hearts upward to God's mercy-seat, but no prayer should be more fervent than this—"God pity the home-sick child!"

Had Vernon's artist friend been seated with the trio around the evening lamp, he might have kept those sleepy eyes unclosed, and have hushed that despairing

sigh, for a cheerful spirit was his, loving childhood and seeking ever with gentle kindness to win its love by many legitimate arts of fascination, to which Vernon, either through ignorance or want of interest, was a stranger, and so, Sybil, her face flushed, her position uncomfortable, and left to herself, slept on, starting and sighing in her dreams as they were colored with the gloomy hues of unwelcome visions.


But at last the conversation came to an end ; something like a plan was decided upon for the future, and Mrs. Gordon, with an apology to Vernon for Sybil's unseasonable slumbers, roused the unconscious child, and told her it was time for her to retire. Her good-night was mechanically said in a drowsy tone, and Sybil was hurried off to bed,—not, however, before Vernon had expressed his sorrow at having so little to entertain her, and his wonder that she took no interest in the books and pictures by which she was surrounded. Then as they passed from the room, Sybil and her grandmother, he sat down and pondered long and deeply, and one would have imagined from his contracted brow that his musings were not of the most pleasant nature.

Nor were they ; he came to the conclusion that Mrs. Gordon was not half so interesting by his fireside as she was in her humble home, her sphere evidently being the cottage, and that children were the most uninteresting creatures in the world ; then he asked himself if he had done wisely in thus adding to his household an aged woman and an ignorant child, the one scarcely a fitting companion for him with his refined, over-fastidious tastes, the other a useless appendage. To be sure, he reasoned, a generous impulse had led him away, the

wish to befriend his mother's friend,—but could he not have shown his generosity in another way? And then what would Linwood think of his chosen companions? Still it was too late for reflections such as these—too late to undo what he had done, and these not very salutary self-communings left him in a bitter mood.

But a few days altered the state of things,—at least with one of the parties concerned, and this was Sybil, who, while her grandmother quietly found out her sphere of duty and usefulness, discovered pleasures inexhaustible for herself, as varied as they were new. What cared *she* in her life of freedom what that grand, cold, sightless man thought of her? She was at liberty to come and go, and she used that liberty to its full extent,—roaming where she would, over hill and dale, through brake and forest, and making new friends at every step among the birds and blossoms of Vernon Grove. Not but there was some method in her life, for her grandmother had taught her in a measure to be methodical, and she had not forgotten, nor did she neglect, the reading, spelling, and writing lessons, which she knew, if faithfully performed, were a sure and solid foundation upon which to build a more ornamental structure.

Her mornings, therefore, were generally spent in the well-stored library, into which she ventured with caution, until she found that she was unmolested; and as she had been told that her father's favorite occupation had been study, close unvaried application to books, she had a romantic idea that his spirit, which her grandmother had taught her to believe was ever present with her, would smile upon her efforts to imitate him,



and thus early were open to her those volumes which other children would have avoided as unprofitable and uninteresting.

To any one occupied in noting the progress of Sybil's mind, it would have been a source of interest and wonder to watch its development, for in a short time she had read through most of the poets,—and then with an intuition which was almost incredible, did we not know that there have been parallel cases, thinking that something solid and true was required to balance her mind, she had recourse to histories, and even works of a scientific character. At first, as she daily took refuge there, it was timidly, and as though she was an intruder, but after two years had passed, she felt strangely at home in that sacred apartment, into which the master of the house seldom entered, and had appropriated a nook there for her own special resort, where she could close her books at will and gaze dreamily out upon the smiling fields, or farther on into the deep mysterious woods with their varied green, until the study of Nature led her back again to the thoughts of others in the precious volumes beside her.

Thus while Mrs. Gordon saw that her charge was busied in the mornings with her so-called studies, and that her afternoons were spent in wholesome exercise, she was quite assured that she was making progress in learning, and that she need give herself no trouble about her physical education, for her cheek was still flushed with health, and her form developing as gracefully and as systematically as the bud matures into the attractive beauties of the rose.

## CHAPTER IV.

"Unfolding slow their ivory fringe,  
The lilies lie upon the pond;  
The firs have caught the sunset tinge  
And murmur elfin-like beyond;  
I think whoever sought that grove,  
To dream an hour of love or heaven,  
Might, wrapt in some strange mystery, rove  
And find this year had grown to seven."

—MISS PARKES.

"Give me music, sad and strong  
Drawn from deeper founts than song;  
More impassioned, full, and free,  
Than the Poet's numbers be:  
Music which can master thee,  
Stern enchantress, Memory."

—BAYARD TAYLOR.

ANOTHER great resource of Sybil was to listen to Mr. Vernon's music. Linwood had said the truth when he told him that he possessed a fine musical taste, and it was one of the few pleasures which he enjoyed alone and independent of any one else, and he now did not regret that he had studied it in former years as a science, and bestowed upon it so much time and attention, which his friends thought might be much better employed in a way more congenial to their own frivolous pursuits.

Unconscious of listeners in the music-room at the Grove, he would recall the inspired passages of the finest composers, or with intense feeling, and with a deep true voice,

sing the songs which had been his favorites in happier hours; and as each twilight saw him seated at his piano with his soul in the melody or the words, so that hour beheld Sybil, half reclining upon the threshold of the door which led out upon the lawn, with her dreamy eyes fixed upon the coming stars, wrapt, silent, motionless, with but one thought in her heart, the cadence of sweet sounds.

To her such music was a new existence, or rather some part of her being which she seemed to have lost or found,—for how unlike it was to her wild untaught carol, more bird-like than human, how strange, and yet how exquisite, that scientific combination of sounds, and she enjoyed intuitively those intricate passages of tangled harmony, which can be scarcely understood except by the favored few whom genius has crowned, or by those patient students who make music a part of their education.

With what longing did she anticipate that twilight hour, with what pleasure did she look for that daily privilege. Motionless as a statue would she sit until the parting strains sounded, and then as they died away and the instrument was closed, softly would she rise and murmur inaudible thanks for the pleasure which she had received, while Vernon in his blindness was all unconscious of her presence, and then in some woodland haunt, believing that she had no listeners but the birds of the air, she repeated the melody that she had learned from Vernon with the same trills and passionate intonations, giving his own emphasis to every word of her child-voice.

His favorite haunt in the woods was a secluded and natural grove, and it was from this spot that the name of his country-seat, Vernon Grove, had been derived. It was, indeed, in



"The very inmost heart  
Of an old wood, where the green shadows closed  
Into a rich, clear, summer darkness round,  
A luxury of gloom."

Even in the brightest sunlight there would be shade and retirement, and the whispers of the wind in the topmost branches, that mysterious voice of the trees, brought to his spirit, if not peace, something akin to it, and like a cradled child listening to a beloved voice, he was calmed beneath the tranquillizing influence. To this spot he was often led by his attendant, who understood enough of Vernon's habits to know that he desired to be left there alone.

It was at such a time as this, that Sybil one day unconsciously intruded upon his solitude.

The tempter, who had led her to the grove, was a bird whose flight she was pursuing playfully, and she was seduced into those quiet precincts before she was aware of it, by its hopping from branch to branch, and gracefully arching its little neck as the distance increased between them, as if it enjoyed and understood the pursuit but felt itself safe in its liberty.

Just at the entrance of the grove, the pretty creature perched itself upon a tall bending twig that rocked to and fro even with its slight weight, and then with a sort of mocking triumph, as if it were sure that Sybil could not reach it there, sent forth such a gush of melody, such a thrilling song, that she stood entranced while she listened.

When the song was ended, Sybil's joy found utterance in the ringing laugh of a careless, happy girl.

"Beautiful creature!" she exclaimed, "was that song

meant for me—for me alone? It must have been ; and what can I do for you in return, as you sit up there on your regal throne? Shall I call you the King of the Wildwood, and will an answering song be tribute fit for a subject to her sovereign ?”

The bird carolled a note as if in return to her question, —a soft, gentle, tremulous note ; and then her voice rose in the forest in one of Vernon’s favorite songs, at first faint and trembling as though “a tear were in it,” then thrilling high in clear bell-like notes ; and at last gushing out in an alto so rich and peculiar, so tender and impassioned, that Vernon forgot his wonder in his pleasure, and simply enjoyed with his whole being.

The intensity of the expression was derived from him, but the trills and variations and the thousand nameless graces, Sybil’s alone.

“It seemed a sea-born music, floating  
The blue waves o’er,  
Like that which charms the mermaids, boating  
By moonlit shore,  
In every dying fall denoting  
The strains in store.”

As her song was finished, from the interior of the grove she heard a voice calling her name, and frightened and half abashed she entered with blushing cheeks, as though she had been guilty of a crime. She knew that it was Mr. Vernon’s voice, and like a culprit she awaited what he had to say.

“Sybil,” said he again, in a voice which had no displeasure in it, “come nearer ; I have been listening to your song ; tell me how and where you learned it, and

who taught you to give such expression to your words? Has some *prima donna* privately given you lessons that you thus seem to have imbibed the very spirit of Italian song?"

"No, never," she said quite solemnly to his playful question. "I would tell you, but I am afraid that you might be angry."

"Not more than the bird to whom you sang it," was the reply, "but why do you think that I might be angry?"

Sybil was candor itself, not so much from principle, for that had not yet been developed, but simply because deceit was not in her nature.

"I do not know exactly why," she answered, "but that you frown at times as though something vexed you, and are so grand and solemn, that I thought you would frown upon me if you knew"—— Sybil stopped.

"If I knew what, child?"

"If you knew," she said softly, and watching every line in his face, "that every evening when you sing and think that you are alone, I sit on the door-sill watching the coming stars and listening to you, and it seems such a calm happy close to a busy day, that I am always sorry when the music stops."

Vernon smiled rather than frowned, and this gave Sybil encouragement to go on.

"And then," she continued, "I try to remember what I have heard, and sometimes sing as you heard me just now, out here in the woods, but *only* for myself."

"And the birds," said Vernon, smiling still more kindly. Then he assured her that it would always give him pleasure to have her for a listener; and wishing to

prolong the conversation, because he was beginning to feel an interest in his young companion, he asked her if she loved music, and if it would give her pleasure to hear those wonderfully gifted artists who have moved a whole world to admiration.

"Oh, yes," she answered quickly, "the poets love it, and so do I."

"And are *you* a poet as well as a songstress, Erato as well as Euterpe?"

"Oh! no, no, not a poet," said she, blushing, "but they all write so much and so feelingly about music, that it was they who first taught me to love it, and then listening to you made me realize what a glorious art it was."

"And pray, what do you know about the poets?" he asked with growing curiosity, "are you a spirit or a fairy that you read their brains, and fashion their thoughts with words before they give them a form themselves? Do you meet them at midnight under the stars, and do they sing for you their unpublished songs?"

"No, sir," she answered, half puzzled at his bantering tone, and half fearful that the dreaded *frown* would follow the words, "those in the library, I mean; grandmother said that I might go there if I were careful with the books, and that you would not object, and, oh, Mr. Vernon, if you could only"—

"Only what, Sybil, do not fear to offend me, I am not the monster you imagine me, eating little boys and girls like an ogre, or killing them with a look; tell me what you were going to say?"

"This was all," she answered in a voice whose tone now was softened by pity, "if you could only see to read what I read there."

Vernon sighed ; it needed not little Sybil's confirmation to tell him how much he lost by his blindness.

"But I must go now," she said, turning away as she saw the sudden quivering of his lip, "for grandmother must be expecting me," and so independent were they of each other that she was hurrying off without another thought of his solitude and blindness.

"Is it so late, then?" he asked, "your song has shortened, wonderfully, my afternoon musings."

"I am very sorry," she said frankly, as though he implied that she had done something wrong, "can I call John for you? It is indeed getting late, for yonder is my star, my summer timepiece I call it, looking down upon the grove, and see, now a light cloud is passing over it, not quite hiding its beauty, and now it shines out again in a solemn steady light."

Sybil was talking to herself, scarcely to her blind companion. Alas! there was no star for him, no cloud except that over his blinded eyes, nor was there for him that pretty picture of the child, pointing with upraised finger to the heavens, yet it gladdened him to think that her unstudied words told of a love of the beautiful in nature, and it drew him nearer to his newly found friend.

"We can go together, can we not, Sybil?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she answered gladly, and was tripping off before him with a child's thoughtlessness, but he called her back, and told her that she had forgotten that he required a guide, and hand in hand they wended their way homeward through the fragrant woods, conversing with the freedom of old acquaintances.

"After all, Sybil," he said, "you are not such a child

as I thought; you are almost as tall as my shoulder, though you must still be very young."

"I am just thirteen," she answered, "but I am so ignorant, so very ignorant, of what my grandmother tells me every girl of my age should be acquainted with, geography, grammer, and arithmetic, that I suppose that is the reason why you thought I was a very little child. As I know so little of what I ought to understand well, she tries hard to instruct me, but she is getting old and feeble now, and cannot teach me much."

Vernon mused awhile; he felt that something was to be done; he felt that he had neglected her during those past two years. That she had indeed done what she could for herself, he doubted not, but what a wild untutored mind was the result; and then her wondrous voice, and her love of the poets, what genius might not they portend, and how much a systematic education might achieve for her!

He was not a man to argue, and think, and ponder upon any fancy that he might have; his resolution was taken in a moment, and he told her of it.

"Just thirteen, Sybil?" he said, "then you must be as one of your poets has said—

'As a rose at fairest,  
Neither a bud nor blown.'

And it is full time for you to have masters to instruct you, and you shall have them, if you desire it, and you shall take lessons upon what instruments, and learn what languages you choose. Would you like to be brilliant and accomplished?"

If Richard could not see her, he knew by the fervent

clasping of her hands, and her heart-felt exclamation of delight, that she appreciated fully his kind offer.

"And are you to do *all* this for me, and I nothing for you?" she asked timidly, after a pause.

"Oh, yes," he answered, with a laugh as careless as in other days, "you must read to me from your friends, the poets; you must write for me, sing for me, and lead me to the woodlands sometimes; you will have work enough to do, Sybil."

"But not too much, I know," said Sybil, who was delighted at the idea of being of importance to any one.

Then they were silent, each busily musing upon the new page of life that they had turned, and nought was heard save the twittering note of a bird seeking its nightly shelter, or their foot-falls on the dead leaves, as they passed homewards through the woods. The setting sun crimsoned the western sky, and the early stars peeped in and out in the twilight, but the man and the child walked on unconscious, thinking only of the starlight and the sunlight that had so strangely and suddenly shone upon their hearts.

And soon they reached their home, from which they had departed almost strangers; but after she had led him to his accustomed seat, and again thanked him for his interest in her, after he had told her smilingly to remember that the obligation was to be mutual, they parted, fast friends.

A day, an hour, a minute, may make the joy or sorrow of a life; we can even date back from a look, a single glance of the eye, to the misery of years, or a clasp of the hand has been the earnest of an existence of unalloyed happiness. And that day at the grove necessa-

rily made the one or the other, the joy or the sorrow of Sybil's life. But who can foretell the future of happy joyous girlhood? We must accompany her step by step to the end.

Sybil, I would have thy frank brow unclouded ever, thy step as bounding, thine eye as tearless as now. But can it be, where *change* is written on earth's fairest scenes? The sunny morning merges into the stormy night, the blooming field of summer becomes the wintry moor, and *thou* must change, but how, and why?

Happy Sybil! With a glad step she hastened to tell her grandmother of her good fortune and to talk of her future accomplishments. She bewildered the simple old lady with her eloquence, and overwhelmed her with her recapitulation of what she would do and be. First she meant to learn about the stars, know their names, and trace the constellations in their rising and setting; she would seek the woods for botanical specimens, and class each flower and shrub with minutest care; she would study geology, and the formation of the earth would be as familiar to her as the formation of a simple bird's nest, while French, German, Italian, and music, would be her daily friends.

Nothing seemed too difficult for Sybil's excited imagination, and if ever an air castle was built, it was then and there by the breathless child, as she recapitulated her future triumphs in learning to her grandmother, who listened almost sadly, for those whom she had loved and lost had been what Sybil called accomplished, and had passed silently away from her sight.

She did not, however, chill the young enthusiast's hopes, but kissing her warmly, in her own simple way



told her that she might live to know many more things than her grandmother did, but that she must never forget that it was she who first taught her the names of those very characters which were the foundation of all book knowledge. Then looking down into the young face which was turned upwards to hers, she continued solemnly :

“And Sybil, dear, one thing more I must add ; remember, among many books there is still but one—one which came from heaven—while all the rest are conceived and fashioned by men ; you will never forget in the new languages, in the brilliant thoughts, in the bewildering romances which will be opened to you, *the Bible*, my child ? Promise me that.”

“Never, oh, never,” was the answer.

*When Sybil promised she kept her word.*

## CHAPTER V.

"Imagine, then, some pupil nymph consigned  
To you, the guardian of her opening mind,  
In all the bloom and sweetness of eleven,  
Health, spirits, grace, intelligence, and heaven ;  
While still from each exuberant motion darts  
A winning multitude of artless arts.  
Withal such softness to such smartness joined,  
So pure a heart to such a knowing mind,  
So very docile in her wildest mood,  
Bad by mistake, and without effort good,  
So humbly thankful when you please to praise,  
So broken-hearted when your frown diamays,  
So circumspect, so fearful to offend,  
And at your look so eager to attend,  
With memory strong, and with perception bright,  
Her words, her deeds, so uniformly right,  
That scarce one foible disconcerts your aims,  
And care and trouble—never name their names !  
Yea, I forget you have one anxious care,  
You have one ceaseless burden of your prayer :  
It is,—great God, assist me to be just  
To this dear charge committed to my trust."

—DR. GILMAN'S *Contributions to Literature*.

RICHARD VERNON faithfully put all his plans for Sybil's education into execution. He sent to a neighboring town for masters, who gave daily lessons to his young charge, and it must be confessed that he felt less absorbed in his own immediate troubles and happier

than he had been for years, for now his life had added to it a new object of interest, and he gave himself up to the work before him with an energy which surprised even himself.

Training up a child to womanhood!

Alas, how unfit was he for the responsibility he had assumed. It was an easy thing to guide her mind in acquiring knowledge, to teach her the varied expressions in music, or to give the right accent to a foreign tongue, but the *heart*, how could he think as he did, of moulding that? In his isolated position he had lost sight of the fact of his unfitness for such an office. None dared to tell him of his faults, he had not even Linwood to remonstrate when he became overbearing, but still the faults were there. Rebellious, unreconciled to the great sorrow of his life, proud, obstinate even to his own hurt, subject to fits of despondency and worse paroxysms of uncontrollable anger, which would obey no law, with no religious sense to temper a disposition not naturally gentle, how could he, how could he say as he did to himself, "I will be the guardian to this child?"

The outward graces of Sybil he might, indeed, cultivate, but never could he lift the veil which covered her heart and say with unfaltering tongue, "I am worthy to be the keeper of the treasure there."

As Sybil's studies confined her to the house more than formerly, she learned something of the impulsive character of Vernon, although she had never seen his temper in its full deformity. Gratitude for the generous part he had acted, pity for his blindness and the knowledge of the interest which he took in her progress, all united

in fostering a feeling of affection for him and an intense interest in his character, but it was not long before she beheld it in its darkest shade, beheld that stubborn will inflexible to the last, that cruel nature seemingly delighting in its power to wound.

A boy, the child of a poor, but pious neighbor, had been convicted of stealing fruit from Vernon's orchard, and he ordered the culprit to be severely punished.

In vain the boy, who was a fine manly youth, confessed his crime and besought Vernon's forgiveness, promising on his knees repentance; Vernon forgave not. The boy reiterated in broken sobs that he knew his fault was a flagrant one and deserved punishment, representing to him whom he had offended, the distress of his mother when the account of his conduct and penalty should be heard by her, that mother who had taught him so differently; he dwelt on the grief of his sisters, who had ever been proud of his manliness and honesty, but fruitlessly did the poor boy plead. In Vernon's mind there seemed to be no recognition of the divine precept of acting toward others as he would have others act towards him, and his heart seemed hardened against mercy.

When Sybil, who was a witness of the scene, beheld that the boy's agonized pleading fell unregarded upon his ears, she took up the offender's cause herself, and besought him in pitying tones for a reprieve. Sybil, whose voice had scarcely dared raise itself hitherto in that grand homestead, was now almost eloquent in another's behalf. She urged Vernon to give him one more trial, she appealed in every possible way to his clemency, even describing the culprit's whole appearance,

his white innocent brow and the clustering curls that lay above it, his intelligent eyes, and the firm, compressed lips which bespoke resolve and character.

"Can these," she pleaded with tearful eyes, "belong to a *thief*, a hardened determined thief? Oh, no, Mr. Vernon, *no*; it was his first fault, and may never again be repeated, *will* never again be repeated, only forgive him and let him go."

She might as well have spoken to the cold midnight stars and have asked their sympathy, or have tried to stay the onward rushing wind. Her interference, her passionate appeal for mercy only exasperated Vernon the more, and with a voice thick with passion, he angrily repeated his order for the boy to be punished, and the lad, with a crushed and broken spirit, was led out to his disgrace.

Sybil turned away from the scene with a shudder; interest in Vernon had been followed by fear; she looked back once ere she departed, and drew a picture mentally of his outward form and inner nature—the one brave and beautiful, with the nobility of manliness about it, the other so black and hideous. Life grew suddenly dark to her, she could not be quite happy in such companionship, it would seem to her like holding the hand of a demon who was dwelling in an angelic form. Slowly she retired to her chamber to weep for the pleading suffering boy, and yet more bitter tears were given to the man who was a stranger to forgiveness. Then she knelt and prayed for both, and felt comforted that at the higher Mercy-Seat forgiveness would be found for the penitent.

Then the morrow came and passed, and other mor-

rows went calmly by, and as nothing occurred in all those happy days of study to ruffle that *seemingly* gentle nature of Vernon, Sybil remembered what had passed only as a frightful dream, or if it ever did come to her as a reality, she had but to look at his composed mien and placid face to assure herself that such an event could not, would not occur again. Such a fiendish state of mind might overtake a man *once*.

So likewise say they, who dwelling at the foot of a volcano, have seen the melted lava rush *once* in destructive torrents down the mountain's side—and yet they have lived to see it again.

As might have been expected from Sybil's quick intelligence, she improved daily in all that she undertook. Vernon personally attended to her English studies, as far as he was able; directing her tasks, giving her subjects for compositions, and teaching her, almost selfishly, inasmuch as it concerned him so nearly, to read well. As for music it was almost a plaything for her, and soon the voices of the blind man and his young charge mingled in song, and no sweeter melody could be imagined than the united harmony.

Mrs. Gordon, when she saw Sybil's progress, forgot her terror of learning in her delight at her grandchild's improvement, and as her cheek still glowed with health, and her form lost none of its roundness, she looked smilingly on when she was appealed to for sympathy or counsel, and left all unreservedly to Vernon's judgment. She was not wrong apparently in so doing, for he was ever watchful of his charge and judicious in his requirements, dividing the hours so faithfully between study and recreation, that it left her no cause for complaint.

Mrs. Gordon saw, too, with pleasure, that Mr. Vernon's manner had changed towards Sybil, and although he still regarded her as a child, he looked upon her as a companion, and though she knew his faults of character and condemned them, she trusted that Sybil's gentleness would exercise a salutary and refining influence over him, while she would be the gainer, too, by the daily intercourse with a mind so cultivated as his, and in listening to his conversation which was at once choice and instructive. Perhaps the thought which reconciled her most to the existing state of things, was, that Sybil would find a friend in Vernon after the grave had closed over her, as she felt before many years must be the case.

There was, at the time of which we are speaking, a great contrast in their evenings to those of the past—once Sybil closed her young eyes in sleep, but now while she read to Vernon in a soft voice, which was modulated in obedience to his fastidious ear, Mrs. Gordon's knitting fell from her fingers, and lulled by Sybil's tone, she, in her turn, wandered in the land of dreams.

"To-morrow you are to have a holiday," said Vernon one evening to Sybil, "Donalzi has asked me for the day to attend a religious ceremony. Let us make it a gala day, Sybil."

He paused, but Sybil was silent, while on his too expressive face a shade of disappointment displayed itself.

"You are not half so delighted as I expected you to be," he continued, "only think of a day without any tasks; why at your age my heart would have throbbed wildly at the idea."

"But you know, Mr. Vernon," said Sybil, a little re-



proachfully, "that I shall not be as free as you say, although I must confess that a real holiday would be a great pleasure to me. In the first place, there is that grand overture to practise, then that mystic German tale to translate, and besides, I have my composition to read to you, and then"—but Vernon interrupted her in any further enumeration of her stupendous duties.

"All these, except the composition, must be for another day, dear Sybil," he said, "for I have disposed of your time myself for to-morrow in a way which I trust will be acceptable to you. I wish you to go on an excursion with me, a real old-fashioned pic-nic, when we shall spend the day near a ruined church some miles distant. It is so picturesque in its decay that I am told it is well worth the little journey; you must be as thoughtful as Red Riding Hood, and take a basket of good things with you; I will order out the large coach, so as to be as comfortable as possible, and John shall be our coachman and attendant."

His voice was so kind, his manner so encouraging, that Sybil, forgetting for a moment how cold and harsh he could be, bounded to his side, and clasping one of his hands in her own, told him how she thanked him, and what pleasure the drive would give her, not forgetting the dinner in the woods, where she fancied herself spreading a rural table and presiding over it; then suddenly remembering who and what he was, to whom she was unfolding every nook and corner of her young heart, and how perhaps he was inwardly ridiculing her for her burst of childish feeling, she blushed scarlet, and drew back covered with confusion.

"Give me your hand again," he said kindly, as he felt



by her abrupt pause something of the truth; then his voice took almost a tone of solemn tenderness as he spoke: "It is a soft hand, a true, good hand, and belongs to a true good heart; my sister has just such a hand, but the world has spoiled her heart, has taken it piece by piece for its own, and a hand without a heart's truth in it is meaningless; she has forgotten her brother, quite forgotten him, I fear. Until the world has spoiled *your* heart, will you be my sister, little Sybil?"

He bent forward earnestly, with that strong yearning for affection in his breast, as if even with his blind eyes he might read her face.

Sybil was silent, she knew not what to answer; she glanced at his strong, powerful frame; his broad, intelligent brow; and then down, as it were, upon her own diminutive self, standing by his side; then she hastily compared their mental difference, where the one knew so much, the other so little; and lastly, she remembered his stern unbending will as opposed to hers, and she was silent still.

"Then you will not promise," said Vernon, moodily, "it is so hard a thing to do and be? Do you forget, Sybil, that years ago, by the cottage porch, you gave me a whole garland which you had woven with infinite care, will you refuse me now the simple flower of sisterly affection?"

We have said that Sybil's was a frank nature; not a shadow of deception appeared in her earnest eyes, but there was trouble in their depths as she glanced at Vernon and tried to frame a reply which would not wound him. No slight excuse would satisfy her, no glossing over of the truth; she could never have forgiven herself

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for trifling with another, and even her own failings were regarded by her with impartial judgment.

Her motto was,

"To thine own self be true,  
And it must follow as the night the day,  
Thou can'st not then be false to any man."

Then after a moment's thought she spoke out slowly and distinctly, and Vernon found himself listening with strange eagerness to her words.

"No, Mr. Vernon, I cannot be what you require, for a sister must be in a measure, as I understand it, a friend, an adviser whom a brother respects; a sister's wishes and inclinations should be consulted, and I have no right to these requirements at your hands; and then I am too young, too thoughtless, to be anything of a guide to one so experienced, so worldly-wise as you are; your nature is too unyielding and imperious to be guided by me."

"And suppose that I should subscribe to these all-important requirements," he asked, "what then?"

"*You never could,*" was the serious answer.

"Tell me why, Sybil?" he said, with growing interest and curiosity.

"Because, to engage to be a sister to any one is no light thing," she answered, sitting down as to an important consultation; "if I had a sister she should tell me all my faults, and reprove me when she thought needful; we would pray together, weep and smile together; her sorrows should be mine, and mine hers; in fine, we would be all in all to each other; now, you know that we, you and I, could *never* be this."

"And why?" was the pertinacious question.

"Oh, because," she still truthfully answered, "you are a great deal older than I am, and are too grand, and tall, and cold, for such intimate companionship. It seems to me if I had a brother, we would be flying together over the lawn and roaming in the fields for flowers, and these *you* could not do; then he would always smile sweetly on me, but your smile has something scornful in it at times, truly a cruel smile; and you walk upon the earth, not as if you could not see God's beautiful world, but as proudly as if it were made for you, and you had a right to every inch of it. Then there is another reason, and it is this, that I am afraid of you, or have been so until to-day, and perfect love, the love of a brother and sister, casteth out fear."

Sybil stopped for breath.

"Thank you," said Vernon, half amused, half angry, with her portrait of him; "I really did not know until this moment how formidable I was. Is there no oasis in the desert, no redeeming point that you could mention, to take the sting from your utter condemnation of myself, to soothe my self-love?"

"Oh yes," answered Sybil, truth still her guiding star, "with all this there is a nobleness about you that seems to belong to no other; a word of praise from you is worth more than a hundred from my teachers, and then though your lips are often

'Curved like an archer's bow to let the bitter arrows out,'

their smile, *sometimes*, as if in contrast to that cruel sarcastic smile of yours, is like sunshine. And besides this, when I am reading romances, all the heroes seem to resemble you when you are happiest; they have the same

soft wavy hair, the same perfect features;”—and Sybil was going on to describe some one who was almost ideally perfect in face and form, when Vernon stopped her.

No wonder that her mind was full of romantic notions, when Vernon's library had been daily open to her; no wonder that in her intercourse with a matter-of-fact old lady, and a morose disappointed man, she had almost lost the language and ideas of childhood, and like a forced hot-house plant, had expanded before her time. Shut out from the world of children, their sports and simple pleasures, her mind took its coloring only from the company it had kept, and yet the playfulness of childhood had not deserted her, though her judgment belonged to maturer years.

“I did not mean that you should particularize so minutely,” said Vernon, somewhat embarrassed by her candor, “but let us return to the old subject. Listen to me, Sybil: after all that you have said I am not discouraged yet; promise to be my sister, and I will act in all things as you desire, because, moreover, I know that you will not abuse your power.”

Sybil sighed, for, from his earnest tone she knew that there could be no escape. It was a stupendous undertaking to her young heart; half her liberty would be lost watching over him; but then she owed him so much and he was so lonely, so doubly lonely because of his blindness and the hard-heartedness of the sister who had forsaken him; what could she do but promise to *try* at least, and putting her hand in his again, she spoke in a firm voice, but with a beating faltering heart, the words which had cost her such a struggle.

"I can but try, and I will; but it must not all be on my side, Mr. Vernon; an orphan, brotherless, sisterless, I, too, have need of a brother's care; what I am to be to you, will you in the same spirit be to me?"

"I will, so help me God," he said impulsively but fervently, "guard you, guide you, and sacrifice my own happiness, if by so doing it would benefit you in any way."

And yet——

Why do I write that word of doubt, that ominous *yet*? She trusted him, tears starting to her eyes as she felt the force of his solemn words and realized that she had gained a friend for life. Was not the firm pressure of those clasped hands a seal on the compact? There was nothing chilling in *that*. She might have been painted as a picture of Faith, as she stood there in her innocent youth with scarcely the knowledge in her heart that there was such a thing in the wide world as a *trust betrayed, a confiding heart deceived*.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Better trust all, and be deceived,  
And weep that trust and that deceiving,  
Than doubt one heart, that if believed  
Had blest one's life with true believing.

Oh, in this mocking world, too fast  
The doubting fiend o'ertakes our youth;  
Better be cheated to the last,  
Than lose the blessed hope of truth."

MRS. BUTLER.

"He who can take advice is sometimes superior to him who can give it."—VON KNEBEL.

SHE *trusted him* and the morrow's sun rose like any other brilliant morning sun from his golden bed in the east, peeping daintily through his embroidered curtains to see if the earth were the same as when he left it yesterday; if the flowers blushed at his coming, and the diamond dew glittered on the long bending speargrass; if the laborer blessed him as he wended his way over the smiling fields, and the birds greeted him with a morning carol. Then he glanced at Sybil's window, flushing the curtain with a rosy glow, to see if a white-robed maiden stood there watching for his rising. In truth he saw her there with the glory of the early morning around her: then boldly gazed his majesty from his gorgeous couch, parting the drapery with his jewelled

fingers; right royal were the robes he donned, right glittering his regal crown: then higher and higher he rose in his azure-paved path, more brilliant each instant he shone, until all the visible earth acknowledged his presence, while he smiled at his reception, and the smile was reflected on hill and plain, on rill and river, on the tall tree tops and the blue-eyed violet, and a busy murmur of life joined the silent welcome, while Sybil, shading her eyes, watched his triumphant passage in the heavens.

Yes, she stood there, watching, but alas, she was scarcely the free-hearted happy Sybil of yesterday, and the sun saw no welcoming smile upon her gentle face. She felt that she had undertaken something gigantic, and as though a little bird of the woodland had promised protection to the eagle; but what she had promised, now that her word was passed, that she determined faithfully to perform.

It was a new experience for Sybil to be gloomy and thoughtful, for her disposition was one of those bright and happy ones "which mourners even approve." And yet that placid temperament by no means betokened a perfect character, for there can scarcely be perfection of character without trial, and Sybil had had no trials. She had received none of that chastening which is necessary to the formation of a proper religious spirit; she was what she appears to us rather from circumstance, from native disposition, than from any effort of hers; she had seldom known what self-denial was, had never been thwarted, and having had no young companions, was a stranger to those little differences which are so apt, while they tarnish the fair heart of childhood

in some instances, to cause others to rise superior to them.

But then, on the other hand, had these early trials indeed come, Sybil was well fortified to meet them by the watchful training of her good grandmother, who had passed through many a furnace of affliction, and who had but one abiding thought, a future world, and how to prepare herself for it. She took every opportunity to teach to Sybil the simple duties of life, and had made the Bible a part of her daily instruction, and Sybil knew that it spoke of a wrong path and a right one, of evil and good, pride and lowliness, lip service and heart service, worldly love and Christian love, and she chose from its mingled elements *the better way*. Then with a practical piety which linked itself with the minutest circumstance in life, Mrs. Gordon had interested her young charge in every-day stories drawn from the chambers of fiction in her own fertile brain, the burden of which was, that life was a battle that had to be fought, that even in that battle we should be as much concerned about small things and trifles as about more important considerations, that a hasty word, a petulant spirit, an unforgiving heart, were the commencement of crimes of a deeper dye, and that the murderer was once an innocent child sleeping upon its mother's breast.

"Stop the first thought of evil," she would say to Sybil, who stood by, listening attentively, more for the sake of the story than the moral, "'an angel could do no more,' and there will be nothing left of which to repent; and above all be careful of those household sins, impatience, fault-finding, petulance, and coldness, which do not so much affect your own happiness as that of



those around you ; at first they may be but a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but those clouds very often grow and cover the whole heavens."

It was by thus being daily fortified that Sybil early learned the lessons of truth and goodness.

As she stood by the window musing upon her first real trial, and watching the upward progress of the sun, it did not occur to her, occupied as she was with other thoughts, that the plan determined upon the night before, was to have their morning meal an hour earlier than usual on account of their projected excursion, and it was not until she heard Vernon's voice busied in giving orders for their pleasure trip, that she hastened down to meet him.

"You are late," he said coldly, as she bade him good morning, "and I have been waiting some time for you ; before one learns anything else in life, he should learn by heart the lesson, '*be punctual.*' Mrs. Gordon does not feel well enough to come down to-day, and you must take her place as something of a housekeeper and general overseer, which, by-the-by, will be quite in accordance with your promise of last night. Come, we will wait no longer, and after breakfast you can inquire if she needs any thing before we go."

Sybil's face grew as white as her morning robe, first because Vernon's tone was abrupt and impatient, and it reminded her that she was a slave to the bond of the night previous, and next, because this hinted surveillance over the household was an unexpected duty and not at all to her taste ; then to be absent from her place at meal-time was an unusual thing for her grandmother, and though her first impulse was to fly to her and ascer-

tain her exact state of health, feeling that Vernon expected her to remain where she was, mechanically she obeyed what she thought was his wish, and yet the restraint annoyed her, and she felt angry with herself for yielding so quietly to what she knew was wrong, nevertheless she led him to the breakfast-room and officiated with grace and sweetness in her novel position.

It was a great effort to her, too, to control her varied emotions, but that which affected her most, was the illness of her grandmother, because it always distressed her to see her suffering; and disappointment, also, was added to her other little troubles, for she felt that her proper place was at her bedside, and that the excursion must be given up; and this last subject she broached to Vernon.

"By no means," he answered hastily, to her proposition, "to postpone the pic-nic;" "our arrangements are all made, the carriage is at the door, and one of the servants can remain with your grandmother until we return."

Sybil's eyes filled with tears; "I never leave my grandmother while she is suffering," she said, "and cannot think of going to-day; some other morning will be just as bright and lovely."

"I have already said," he retorted in a tone so stern that Sybil started, "that to-day we go, and on no other; I shall expect you to accompany me;" and calling his servant, he left the room before Sybil could frame words to answer.

"Trifles do, indeed, make up the sum of life," she said to herself, as he left her alone, "what unhappiness a single selfish imperious will can create!" She wondered

where her courage had fled, her determination to correct his faults when in opposition to her ideas of right. A very breath of air they were, it would seem, gone, all gone at the sound of those emphatic words—“*to-day we go.*”

But no, Sybil's moment of self communion gave her strength, and she arose with a stolid look of rebellion on her face.

“I will *not* go,” she said, firmly planting her foot on the ground as if defying a whole legion of foes, “I will *not* leave one who loves me, lonely and suffering, for an insignificant ruined church, no, not even for the ruins of Rome, and I shall tell him so.”

Sybil might have spared herself her childish passionate exclamations of indignation, and the scornful contraction of her haughty brow, for her tragic attitude, worthy of theatrical boards, was suddenly altered to one of joy as the door opened, and Mrs. Gordon entered, who in answer to Sybil's numerous questions, told her that she had been seriously indisposed, but that she was now quite restored again. Sybil offered to remain at home with her for fear of a return of her illness, but Mrs. Gordon positively declined her company, telling her that she must, on no account relinquish her anticipated drive, especially since she had promised Vernon her sisterly guidance, and before many minutes elapsed, she found herself seated by Vernon and on their way to the ruined church.

Sybil entered upon her pleasure excursion in silence; Vernon was silent, too, but from a different cause; *he* was enjoying the dewy freshness of the morning, the singing of the myriad birds, and the exhilarating swift-

ness of their course through the fragrant woods; *she* was wondering how best she might tell him that she thought his conduct had been selfish and unfeeling, and that spite of his angry tone she had determined not to come, had her grandmother's indisposition continued. But, alas, she knew not how to begin; the woodland bird was indeed no match for the proud eagle. She had a vague idea that something in the form of a sermon might touch that hardened heart, and she had already selected her text from a sentence which she had met the day before, and which had dwelt forcibly on her mind: "The worst education which teaches *self-denial*, is better than the best which teaches everything else, and not that," when Vernon unconsciously broke the silence, and for ever scattered the text, argument, and conclusion of Sybil's anticipated discourse.

"What a divine morning it is, Sybil. God gives us an earnest of Heaven sometimes in a day such as this; is it not perfect, and to your favored eyes, does not the sun shine with a peculiar brilliancy?"

"Yes," she answered, vacantly, scarcely knowing that even that unsatisfactory monosyllable had escaped from her lips.

"And the birds," continued Vernon, "they seem full-choired this morning; are there not many around us enjoying the breath of Spring? But what a busy kind of enjoyment! I trust that the time may never come, if the transmigration of souls be not a fable, for mine to dwell in the body of a *bird*. What an impatient, twittering, restless existence; what a building and pulling down, what energies wasted, what a round of food-seeking, food-devouring engagements they have. No,

give me the stupid calm of the snail rather; but you have not answered my question, Sybil; do you disdain simple prose and require poetry on such a day as this as a medium of conversation? Well, then, are not the little songsters, to quote something quoted by everybody—

‘Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks  
In Vallambrosa?’ ”

But all in vain was Vernon’s earnest call for sympathy, and his enthusiastic mood was only replied to by a faint, “I believe so.”

“But do you not *know* it? Of what are you thinking this morning, Sybil?”

Sybil roused herself at last to answer in a grave and thoughtful tone.

“I was not thinking, I confess,” she said, “either of sun or birds, but I was thinking, Mr. Vernon, of your heartless conduct this morning, and in what language to couch it, and how I could tell you, that if I had not left my grandmother well and cheerful, I would have braved your displeasure and would have remained at home with her.”

Vernon smiled in derision, then frowned. It was a new thing to be found fault with, quite new for any one to dictate to him what he should or should not do or be, and he spoke bitter words of sarcasm, forgetting quite the bond of the night before.

“You display a wonderful dignity,” he said, bowing low to Sybil, “an extraordinary propriety; why not have displayed this unparalleled and heroic devotion *before* we started, and I could easily have dispensed with

your reluctant presence ; but stay, we are not harmonious, I perceive, with these elements ; they betoken anything but a *pleasure trip*, I will order John to return."

"Stop, Mr. Vernon," said Sybil with a trembling voice, "I have a few words to say to you before you give your order. I *do* think that you were wrong this morning, and I determined to tell you so, because you bestowed upon me the right to criticise your faults in our new relation of last evening ; and besides, let the question come home to yourself ; do you think that I would have left *you* had you been lonely and in pain, for any fleeting party of pleasure ? *No, upon my word I would not !*"

The soft accents of the truthful voice fell like dew upon his angry heart. Ah, then, he had a claim upon some one who would remain by his couch were he suffering ; some one other than a paid menial to attend to his wants. There was positive comfort in the thought. Lonely, deserted, afflicted, he still had one friend, a bright, companionable being, who would not forsake him even for her own pleasure. The idea had a wonderfully soothing effect, while common-place thanks seemed wretchedly out of place after her earnest tone, and "God bless you, Sybil," came struggling through his quivering lips.

But that was not enough for Sybil. Was she infatuated that she could not be satisfied with his softened mood ? She wanted the whole letter of the law fulfilled ; she wanted him to confess his fault like a little child, to say that he was sorry and would do so no more,—to do anything that evinced repentance.

"Then do you not think that you were wrong this

morning? Oh, Mr. Vernon, only say it, and feel too."

Vernon was silent, Sybil half frightened for fear she had ventured too far, but it was not that which annoyed him. The words refused to come to his lip because he could not understand the new sensation; he could not realize how he, a man of the world, an independent actor and thinker, sat there swayed and influenced by the remarks of a simple country girl.

"Then you will *not* say it," she said mournfully, "I can answer your question now. The sun does not shine brightly to-day, nor are there myriads of birds who sing joyfully in our path. The earth is a very gloomy place; come let us return, since we both wish it."

But the order was not given, and in its stead four little words were spoken by a manly voice, which brightened wood, and blossom, and sky, and birds, and more than each and all, Sybil's downcast face.

"*I was wrong, Sybil*"—four little words, but quite enough for her who heard them, for buoyant with life and happiness, laughing, talking, singing, she now showed to Vernon a new and fascinating phase of her ever-varying character.

As the carriage left the beaten road and entered the shaded wood, Sybil's tone became more subdued. "Do you not perceive," she said to her companion, "by the cold dampness of the air, that we are close upon a deliciously sheltered spot, where the boughs almost meet and mingle overhead? It puts me in mind of some lines that I met with the other day—

'Scarce doth one ray  
Even when a soft wind parts the foliage, steal

O'er the bronzed pillars of the deep arcade;  
Or if it doth, 'tis with a mellowed hue  
Of glow-worm colored light.'

How beautiful is that description of such a place as this, and then add to it, but alas in my own cold prose, that a stream gleams at intervals through the trees, and that the rippling murmur that you hear, is the flowing of its waters over crystal-looking pebbles, and you have a rural picture unsurpassed for quiet beauty. You have lived in the city, Mr. Vernon, and I sometimes think seem to prefer its crowded streets to this hush of nature, but to me it appears as if no art could equal the delight, the peace, that the country brings."

"In days past," returned Vernon, "when the world was to me what it is to you, it is true that I preferred a more active busy life, a life among men; *now* I would not make the exchange, but let me have my sight again, and I would gladly return once more to the domain of art. Think of the luxuries of a city life, its amusements, its resources, its pictures, its architecture! You do not know my friend Linwood, Albert Linwood, but were he here he would convince you, with his eloquent words, of your mistaken choice, for he, too, loves a city life and its advantages, and only visits the country occasionally for inspiration, returning with renewed zest to his pictures, and that artificial life which you are so ready to condemn."

"You betray both him and yourself," said Sybil quietly, "when you say that he must needs come *to the country* for *inspiration*, for from whence do poets and painters obtain their ideas and images except from the study of nature?"



"I am afraid that I have given you a false idea of Linwood's predilections; he is scarcely a devotee to nature, unless it be human nature when he studies it to give a life-like reality to an expression in the face of a portrait. Although he occasionally transfers a landscape view to canvass (for instance, that exquisite picture of Evening, which hangs in your chamber, and which you admire so much for its peculiar coloring), what most engrosses him is portrait painting, or sketching ideal faces of angelic loveliness, for he is a perfect worshipper of beauty in woman."

Vernon stopped, bent his head downward for a moment, as though he was ashamed of trying to hide the flush that covered his face, then raised it, while Sybil noticed that when he spoke again, it was no longer with his clear measured utterance, but with a quick out pouring of word after word, as though he must say, and that in a given time, a certain number of sentences.

"He painted a face once for me, Sybil," he resumed, "not an ideal, but a living, breathing reality, a face so exquisitely lovely, so queen-like in its majestic grace, that to see it was to love it, and *I* loved it, fearfully, madly, until I discovered that what was so fair, so innocently fair, could be false too. You have heard that the pious monks of La Trappe have ever before them the painted form of a beautiful woman, and that on the other side of the portrait, a hideous skeleton is depicted;—this is fixed by machinery so as to revolve continually in a way that makes the figures blend in disgusting proximity, a type of the rotteness and insecurity of all earthly beauty, a warning that even thus most surely mingles life's divinest creations with death's unsightly carcass; so *I*

would have had some monster, some fiend of the shades of darkness, painted on the reverse of Linwood's picture and have called it by its fitting name, *Deceit*."

Vernon's breath came quick, and he gasped out rather than spoke his closing words, while Sybil watched him in mute wonder. She would have been glad to hear more of that mysterious picture which had moved Vernon so, and the description of which had given him a death-like pallor, and brought out cold drops of dew upon his brow, but he appeared indisposed to reveal any more than he had done, and sinking back within the carriage, covered his face with his hands and seemed to give himself up to thought.

Sybil sat statue-like, fearing to annoy him even by a movement, and thus he dreamed, perchance of some terrible hour of the past, perhaps of an uncertain future, until they found that they had reached their destination, the ruined church.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Thus solemnized and softened, death is mild

And terrorless as the serenest night:

Here could I hope, like some inquiring child

Sporting on graves, that death did hide from human sight

Sweet secrets, or beside its breathless sleep

That loveliest dreams perpetual watch did keep."

SHELLEY.

"Wasting storms

Have striven to drag it down: yet *still* it stands,

Enduring like a truth from age to age."

BARRY CORNWALL.

SYBIL and her companion alighted in silence, words seeming superfluous to convey to each other the impress which their minds had received from the solemn stillness that reigned around them. They both felt that they were treading on sacred ground, and that besides being the home of prayer, the place where, in time past, songs of praise had mingled with the carol of the birds, the graves of the dead were around them and in their very path. She led Vernon at once to the shaded churchyard, and there, seated on a half-defaced slab, thick with the mould of years, they listened awhile with a deep sense of tranquil enjoyment to that unceasing forest requiem, the rustling of the shivering leaves, now full like a chorus of mournful voices, and then dying away as if echoed from spirit-land.

"Here the weary rest," at last said Vernon, breaking the long silence, "yes, there remaineth *a rest*; the Bible says that, does it not, Sybil?"

"Yes," she answered softly, and with an audible sigh, "but only *for the people of God*."

"Does Sybil sigh for herself, or others?" asked her companion. "For myself, myself," she answered eagerly. "Oh, Mr. Vernon, in such a place, in such an hour as this, does not the earth and all its scenes seem a dream, and only what follows after, the reality? And yet how, how much we care for the fevered dream, how little for the solemn reality! It is only when some experience like this overtakes me, and presses upon me a solemn admonition, that I feel the true significance of discipline, and that

'This life of mine  
Must be lived out, and a grave *thoroughly won*.'

"If you in your purity are not fit for the *rest* of the grave and the *peace* of another world, then who on this wide earth is?" said Vernon.

"Hush, hush," answered Sybil earnestly, to what she thought Vernon's almost impious remark, "you know not what you say; ah, no; good enough for those pure skies! One could scarcely be good enough without some severe trial like yours, Mr. Vernon, if you would only view it aright, or the death of some beloved friend bringing anguish and desolation with it. Sometimes I am rash enough to wish that some great trial would overtake me, or that a fearful temptation might assail me, so that I might indeed be like those to whom the Scriptures

declare, *and to him that overcometh I will give a crown of life.*"

Sybil's whole soul shone in her face as she uttered these words, not her every-day soul of cheerful gladness, but her *Sabbath soul* with a halo of holiness around it. This would-be martyr spirit gave to her countenance a lustre that it had never worn before, and had even Linwood's critical eyes beheld her, she would have been to him a picture, an inspiration!

"You are an eloquent preacher," returned Vernon, "but you must remember that we are not within the church, you as pulpit orator and I as audience; besides, you forget that I hold my own peculiar tenets, and that like Faust I would say, 'that I know enough of this life, and of the world to come we have no near prospect; what need is there for man to sweep eternity; all he can know lies within his grasp.' Your preaching therefore will not reach my case; moreover, you must remember that I am ignorant of the beauties around, which, no doubt, you are enjoying, and that I brought you here for the very selfish reason that you might describe them to me."

Sybil sighed again; she could have spoken longer, more eloquently still upon the forbidden subject, but she felt that Vernon neither understood nor appreciated what she said.

"Sighing again, Sybil," said Vernon in a half-bantering tone, and speaking recklessly, as if he cared not whether she applied what he said to himself or her,— "he who sighs because he has no misfortunes, will soon find that they will come to him unbidden; let one be ever so happy in life, his paths all sunshine, his existence

so joyous that he will be ready to exclaim 'let me be earth's denizen for ever,' and in a night, in a single hour, a hand will come and smite him to the ground, perhaps closing his eyes to the beauty of life, and so closing his heart to holier influences for ever. No, let him enjoy while he may; why fight the never ending battle of existence to be what the world calls 'good?' Why even try, when daily as he tries he fails?"

"I have read somewhere," said Sybil sadly, pained by Vernon's levity and indifference, "that what we earnestly and truly aspire *to be*, that, in some sense, *we are*, and the mere aspiration, by changing the frame of mind, for the moment realizes itself! Oh, let us never give up trying even to the end."

Sybil spoke earnestly, and Vernon seemed to listen with interest, then as if desiring to dismiss the subject altogether, he renewed his request for his companion to describe the scene.

"It is wild enough," she began, "to be the very haunt and home of the Dryads, and old Pan himself might take shelter beneath these enormous trees, which are fit

———'to be the mast  
Of some great admiral,'

and which shoot up from the knarled exposed roots into a straight tall growth, interlacing their boughs overhead. This is their appearance near, but as I look through the wood, myriad gothic arches meet the eye, until their line of beauty is lost in the distance. Here and there, long vines, some of them almost as thick as a sapling, hang from the trees, trailing their shaggy barks in varied fes-

toons, or creeping like dark serpents on the ground. Around us are many slabs, some broken, some preserved entire, but all worn with age and covered with damp green moss. Then by the inscriptions it would seem that husbands and wives lie side by side, and soldiers rest here peacefully from war and bloodshed. Here, too, at our very feet, are little children sleeping, and tender words show that some home was darkened by their early flight. To the right stands the church, which is indeed a ruin, but very picturesque, as you said, in its decay. Scarcely an arch is preserved entire, and the sunshine glances down into the unsheltered aisles below. Here and there, the young, fresh, green, and the weather-stained leaves of the ivy mix their shades in charming contrast, and entwine around the crumbling and broken pillars."

"Fit types of my fresh young Sybil and her weather-beaten friend," interrupted Vernon playfully.

Sybil looked at him fixedly for a moment. One peculiarity of hers was, that though she appreciated wit and brilliant repartee, her mind could not take in the equivocal meaning of badinage. Her own nature was so transparent, that she looked for the same transparency in others. The soft breeze lifted Vernon's brown hair from his brow, and his face wore such a calm happy look, so free from any aspect of care, that Sybil said gently, "you are not so very old, Mr. Vernon; at least you do not look so to-day."

"No incredible amount of years has passed over my head, certainly," he answered, "but the last of them, ah, the last of them have been weary, weary years, little Sybil. If one does indeed live in feelings and heart-

throbs, and not in years, mine should be reckoned at nearly a century, while the young tender ivy upon which not even a rude breath has blown, is in the very spring of life, and I must persist in comparing you to it and myself to the old sere leaves."

Sybil smiled at that adjective "little" which Vernon almost always prefixed to her name, for though not yet arrived at the medium height of woman, in the last three years she had developed wonderfully, and she felt that to any one save Vernon, she would be *little Sybil* no longer. She liked to hear it come unconsciously from his lips, assuming as it did to her ears a character of endearment.

"And yet," she answered thoughtfully, looking up to the ruin, "they twine together in perfect harmony, and one would lose half its fitness and beauty without the other."

*She* thought only of the ivy, while Vernon thought but of her, of her gentleness and goodness, and her ever-watchful care of him, and he wondered mentally, how long the tender green would be content to dwell side by side with the weather-stained leaves, and what rude shock would come at last to tear them asunder. But the subject was too painful for him to dwell upon long, and he hastened to direct his thoughts into another channel.

First they had their rural feast, where Sybil's ingenuity was called upon in many ways to supply the place of home comfort, and then Vernon, after praising her for her usefulness and activity, suggested that upon their programme her composition should be next placed.

"What more fitting time could we have," he said,



"than when the Spring herself breathes over us, to read an essay upon her charms? I suppose that it will be as good as all your compositions are," he continued, "but I think that I must excuse you from saying anything original upon the subject."

"I knew it, I felt it," said Sybil eagerly, "I knew that I could only say what others have said, and so, though perhaps you may not quite like it, I put my thoughts into rhyme as a sort of change from my old beaten track of prose, but you have taught me to keep my ideal of poetry so high, that I am half ashamed of them, and if you do not like my ambitious attempt, I can only promise never more to soar in a region so much beyond my powers."

Vernon was neither pleased nor displeased, he was simply curious about Sybil's verses, and for the first time for months, he had a passionate yearning for sight, so that he might see her expression, which he felt if it were not one of beauty, must be one of perfect confidence in him and trust in his judgment, but a darkness like the night only answered his impracticable wish.

The group was a striking one; the ruined church and broken arches, the shaded spot and giant trees, and the grave-yard, upon one of the tombs of which Vernon reclined, his head resting upon his hand; then at his feet on a mound, which might have been a grave, sat his companion, trembling, looking up for sympathy, even from those sightless eyes, ere she began the reading of her verses.

"Stop," said Vernon, as she unfolded the paper, while his old sarcastic mood, almost unbidden, rose to his lips in chilling words; "the verses must have a name, of

course; surely something original might have been aimed at there. Have you not called the piece by some such cognomen as this—'The Jubilee of the Year' or 'The Birth of the Verdant Leaves?' "

"No," said Sybil, falteringly, while the hot blood dyed her face crimson, and the paper rustled in her trembling hands, "it is simply Spring-time."

"Read on," he said, and obediently she read what she had written :

"God of the hours, God of these golden hours!  
My heart o'erflows with love  
To Thee, who giv'st with liberal hand these flowers;  
To Thee, who sendest cool, delicious showers  
Fresh from the founts above.

"God of the hours, the fleeting, checkered time,  
When nature smiles and weeps,  
Thou paintest sunset clouds with hues sublime,  
Thou tunest bird-notes to the joyous chime  
That all creation keeps.

"Pale emerald trees, how gracefully ye twine  
Around your boughs a wreath;  
Or does some angel hand, with touch divine,  
Bring from celestial bowers your verdure fine  
To deck the bowers beneath?

"How silently your leaflets, old and brown,  
On undulating wings,  
In autumn months, came floating, floating down,  
To form a carpet as they formed a crown  
For you, ye forest kings!

"Well may ye bend with proud and haughty sweep,  
For sunbeams love to lie  
Upon your boughs; the breeze ye captive keep,  
And even the dew-drops, which the night-clouds weep,  
Upon your leaflets die.

"Last eve the moon on modest twilight beamed,  
And told the stars 'twas Spring!  
She swept the wave, deliciously it gleamed,  
She touched the birds, and woke them as they dreamed  
A few soft notes to sing.

"God of the April flowers, how large thy gift—  
The rainbow of the skies  
That spans the changing clouds with footsteps swift,  
And 'rainbows of the earth,' that meekly lift  
To Thee, their glorious eyes.

"And not content with flowers rich and fair  
Thou givest perfume, too,  
That loads with burden sweet the tender air,  
And comes to fill the heart with rapture rare,  
Each blushing morn anew.

"God of the Spring-time hours, *what give we Thee*  
While thus Thou bounteous art?  
Thou owest us nought, we owe Thee all we see—  
Enjoyments, hope, thought, health, eternity,  
The life-beat of each heart.

"This morn came birds, on pinions bright and fleet,  
A lullaby to sing  
To Winter as he slept,—but other voices sweet  
The low dirge drowned, and warbled carol, meet  
To greet the waking Spring.

"Thus trees, and birds, and buds, and skies conspire  
To speak unto the heart,  
'Renew thy strength; be fresh; be pure; desire  
To be new-touched with purifying fire,  
That Evil's growth depart.'

"God of the heavens! from our bosoms blow  
The sin-leaves, and plant flowers  
Bedewed by gentlest rains, that they may show,  
How tended by thy love *alone they grow*,  
God of these golden hours!"

Gradually Vernon's face was turned away from Sybil's view, for he did not care that she should see what was impressed thereon. Interest, and wonder at the correct collocation of words, had given place to a softened mood, which moistened his eyes and busied his mind in retrospection, and the words,

"Renew thy strength; be fresh; be pure; desire  
To be new-touched with purifying fire,  
That Evil's growth depart,"

woke a strange chord of yearning in his breast, to be pure, and fresh, and strong. Words were not at his command just yet, and after a minute's pause he turned to speak, to criticise the verses, as Sybil seemed to be waiting for praise or blame, but his intention was interrupted by the words, "hush, hush," and Sybil's moving nearer to him and checking him with a cautious whisper.

"Oh, Mr. Vernon," she said in the same guarded voice, "if you could only see it, only see the bird that has alighted on one of the arches! It cannot belong to our woods at all, for I have never beheld another like it. So bright and gorgeous is it, as the sun glances upon it while it peacefully folds its wings, that one can scarcely help fancying that it is the guardian angel of this spot, or some spirit in disguise watching over the dead."

"Oh!" whispered Vernon, in return, the excitement

of a sportsman shining on his face, "a bird, did you say, *not common to these woods!* Oh, for one moment's sight to these blind eyes! Sybil, child, run noiselessly to John and bid him bring hither his loaded gun; I had forgotten for an instant what a good marksman he is, and that he never misses aim."

Sybil's face flushed for shame, and she stood rooted to the spot. What! kill that bird that like an angel of peace stood poised above them; never, while she could prevent it. Kill it for a mere sportsman's love of game or an idle curiosity! the thought was desecration, and her spirit grew bold in the exigency.

"You would not, you could not kill that bird," she said with passionate pleading, "it seems as if it were never made to die, at least by hand of man; never did a king wear such a jewelled crown as its glittering crest. To kill it would be wanton cruelty, and would, in my estimation, gratify no feeling but a base and unworthy one."

"You speak as if you were the special protectress of the bird," said Vernon in low smothered tones, and in his turn excited; "because it *is* so beautiful and peculiar, is the very reason why I must and will have it."

*Must and will!* Sybil trembled for the unconscious creature.

"Think of the holy place," she whispered again, glancing around, "of that solemn church, of these graves, of the little children sleeping around; think of this home of Death desecrated by an unholy sound, polluted by a senseless act! Oh, Mr. Vernon, call it romance if you will, ridicule it, pour upon me your anger and indignation, but for this time grant me my

wish and spare that feeble life. There, thank heaven, it lifts its wings as if about to fly, and will soon be safe from your cruelty; but no, it only turns its beautiful arched neck to the sunlight, and pleads for life and liberty with a song."

Truly Vernon's evil spirit was in the ascendant, and a demon seemed to urge him on. Thrusting Sybil hastily but gently away, he arose, and in a subdued but audible voice, called to his servant, who was at some distance, to load his gun and hasten thither.

Then a storm of anger shook Sybil's slight frame. Her will, "full statured," showed itself in her lightning glance. Fiercely the fire of scorn flashed from her eyes, and her words dropped like hot lava upon a plain.

"Mr. Vernon," she said, imperatively, taking a strange sort of pleasure in uttering the scorn that welled in such an endless stream to her lips, "Mr. Vernon, it has come to *this*; *you* have taken *your* resolution, *I, mine*. That bird *shall not* die, *shall* not be wantonly destroyed, and the moment that sees John approach with loaded gun one step this way, sees also the bird frightened away from his resting place by me, floating far out of the reach of the best marksman's aim."

"How dare you thwart my will?" returned he passionately, "how dare you put your weak child-nature in opposition to mine?"

"I dare," she said, her heart beating wildly and her voice trembling with the storm that had shaken her, "because I think that I am in the right; because the bird is happy, and the place holy; and again I dare," said she, in softened accents, "because what a *sister* could say to a *brother*, that alone have I said to you."

Then she put her slight hand kindly in between Vernon's clenched fingers in a caressing way, not knowing whether he would let it remain or rudely cast it away, but her silent prayer was heard, and it lay not rejected, but safe under that broad strong palm, like a nestling under the parent-bird's wing.

But ah, who could turn away from Sybil's offered hand! Vernon did not, but crushing it softly in his, he said gently, "You have conquered; my little sister has conquered a proud, rough, unfeeling man, who came well nigh forgetting in his madness a promise which he called upon heaven to witness. Let the bird live!"

Sybil looked up as he spoke, but it was no longer upon the broken arch. Soaring far, far away, she beheld it till it was lost to sight in the cloudless sky, its mission over that ruined church, whatever it might have been, being accomplished.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Like an enfranchised bird, who wildly springs,  
With a keen sparkle in his glancing eye,  
And a strong effort in his quivering wings,  
Up to the blue vault of the happy sky—  
So my enamored heart so long thine own,  
At length from Love's imprisonment set free,  
Goes forth into the open world alone,  
Glad and exulting in its liberty."

MRS. NORTON.

"Hopes and fears  
Start up alarmed, and o'er life's narrow verge,  
Look down—on what? a fathomless abyss."

YOUNG.

SYBIL bought her triumph of will at a dear price, it would seem, for Vernon was moody and silent during the homeward ride, and for a week scarcely noticed her music or the progress she was making in her studies. She tried two or three times to break the gloomy spell around him by uttering some playful remark, or trilling a bird-like song, but all was to no purpose. She felt that they were widely severed in disposition, purpose, and thought, and that he had asked her an impossible thing when he desired she might be his sister, for to a sister a brother's heart was open, but against her he had closed his with an impenetrable barrier of reserve and coldness.

As for Vernon, he scarcely knew himself the cause of



his gloomy or rather thoughtful mood, but rested upon the idea that it was a phase which would pass away with a change of weather. If any one had told him that he was thoughtful, because a child had stirred the stagnant waters of his soul by speaking truths to him which he had never dwelt upon, or thought of at all, except vaguely,—had any one told him that the self-examination with which he was probing his spirit originated in the conversation of Sybil and the religious tenor of her verses, he would have been startled at the idea. He, the selfish man, tried in vain to shake off the master spirit of thought that merged at length into severe self-investigation,—but heaven has many ways of sowing the good seed; the wind may blow it, or it may drop by chance upon the ground,—not that Vernon's soul was ready for the planting, for hardened by frost and ice, it opened not yet to the sower. It was this unsatisfactory state of things, and the knowledge of it in part, that kept him cold towards others and discontented with himself.

A letter from Linwood at last broke the spell, and as Vernon handed it to Sybil to read to him, one of his old rare smiles overspread his countenance, for his love for his absent friend was one of the bright spots in his character.

Sybil drew back as he pressed the letter upon her and hesitated.

"Should I, ought I, to read it?" she asked, "Mr. Linwood is a stranger to me, and there may be something in his letter which I ought not to see."

"You misjudge Linwood," answered Vernon warmly, "he has a mind as pure as a child's, and you will find nothing unworthy in what he has written."

"I did not mean *that*," replied Sybil blushing, "I only imagined that he might deem me prying or officious, for a letter from friend is a sacred thing."

"In that case," answered Vernon, "I promise to be peacemaker, but pray do not keep me in suspense any longer, I am anxious to hear what he has written."

Thus urged, Sybil demurred no longer, fearing a return of Vernon's displeasure and consequent coldness, and opening the letter, which was post-marked *Florence*, she thus began :—

"DEAR VERNON :

"As you feared never to become accustomed to the necessary third person, you made me promise to write to you only in extreme cases—that is, if I ever found myself supremely happy or supremely miserable; as the former sensation is pre-eminently in the ascendant now, I can refrain no longer from imparting to you some of my experiences, and from telling you how, each day, a prayer ascends from my heart to heaven for the welfare of my generous friend.

"You have opened to me a new field of beauty, such as I never dreamed of, both in the province of art and nature. My eyes feast on loveliness, my heart beats with fuller pulsations than in my own land. I feel that I am treading on enchanted ground, and associations from the past come thronging in endless procession from the chambers of my brain. Oh, Vernon, to have seen the Lake of Como, the Cathedrals, the Laocoon, St. Peter's, and the paintings and statuary in the old world, is to have lived no ordinary life.

"I might go on enumerating the beauties which arise on every side, but I know that with you it would be familiar ground, and might weary you, still I could not help feeling that you ought to have a realizing sense of my deep thankfulness, and it is for this merely that I write to you.

"When I think of your sympathy, which will meet me on my return when we can talk over my experiences, I am doubly grateful to God that you were permitted to see this world-wide panorama of wonders, and that you have travelled from snow-crowned Russia to

the vineyards of beautiful Spain. Even in your blindness you could never be entirely lonely, for after a visit to Europe memory would ever be a busy companion.

"To me this living in the past is enchanting, and of course to the artist-mind the enjoyment is double. It seems to me, too, that I would never have cared to journey abroad, unless I had received a refined education, so that I might appreciate every classical allusion, and feel at home in history. There are men around me now, ignorant, soulless men, in whom the curves of an exquisite piece of sculpture rouse no feeling of admiration, whose eyes see no glory in an Italian sunset, who travel merely because it is fashionable, and in whom no grateful religious thought is awakened. False men are they, Vernon; and, oh, if I could only sit by you for an hour, I could tell you how the sight of all this beauty, natural and artistic, appeals to my religious nature, and how my heart beats more fervently to God and man, and my whole soul is bared to receive divine influences from heaven. No, I have not come here, even as regards my spiritual welfare, in vain.

"I have painted one work since my arrival in Florence, which the critics honor me by praising very much. It is an ideal, *my* ideal of a perfectly beautiful woman, and I call it my Inspiration. Need I tell you, my friend, that I mean it to be yours when I return? Would that you could *see it*, and criticise it, for upon your judgment I have ever depended; but I will not murmur, for I believe that all of God's dispensations are for the best.

"Send me a line through your amanuensis, if you do not incline to forward a longer communication, and tell me something of your welfare, —if you are still in the country, and whether you have any companions.

"Yours, in all sincerity,

"ALBERT LINWOOD."

"I should like to know him," said Sybil quietly, as she refolded the letter.

"And why?" asked Vernon.

As a man of the world Vernon had used that little monosyllable with great effect; it had been more powerful than many words, and joined with a sympathizing

look of interest in his fine eyes, had extracted many a confession which would otherwise have remained unrevealed, and now the force of habit led him to use it still. There is often magic in one word, calling out many in answer.

"Because," was the reply, "it seems to me that I would like to talk to him, and tell him of my faults; still better, too, would I love to hear him speak of that religion which he prizes so much. Ah, if he had sisters, how happy they must be."

What an incentive was this to any one who loved Sybil, to be worthy in her eyes.

"It is worth the trying," thought Vernon; but thinking on his part, in the present instance, was far from acting.

Not many days after this, Vernon summoned Sybil to his side, and told her that the time had arrived when she could be really useful to him, and that he had some work for her to do; he wanted her to answer Linwood's letter. Such an appeal she could not escape from, and she sat down and wrote under his direction the following words:—

"You are astonished, dear Albert, at this ladylike hand-writing, instead of John's bold chirography, but 'tis only little Sybil Gray's, who writes at my dictation, therefore be mystified no longer. Now, Sybil is the granddaughter of my mother's early friend, Mrs. Gordon, both of whom have, at my invitation, made my house their home. Mrs. Gordon, when her health allows her, is an admirable manager in my bachelor establishment, and Sybil has masters, gathers flowers, dresses the vases, and, as you see, writes for the dismal blind gentleman.

"I cannot express to you how much pleasure your letter gave me, and now that I have Sybil as writer and reader of our correspondence, let me hear from you often,—and do not be particular about the

number of your sheets, for the dear child's good nature will bear her through them all, even if their name were legion.

"You ask me about *myself*; I think, I know that I am happier than when you were here. I can trace this change to no particular cause, yet on the whole I enjoy life more, human nature seems better, and I am not quite the worldling that you left me. I begin to be reconciled in some slight degree to my misfortune, and sometimes, remember, Linwood, only *sometimes*, I even bring myself to regard it as a blessing,—for, had I still retained my sight after that terrible fever, I might have remained in the city, constantly in the presence of her whom I have by this means avoided; and so weak is the human heart, that even knowing what she is—even having seen her unmasked—her wonderful beauty and fascination might have bound me to her prisoner for life, whereas there is now no danger in absence,—and, oh, Linwood, reflect upon the almost hell upon earth that I should have endured had I passed my life"——

Sybil made a movement that arrested Vernon's words—she rose from the table and laid down her pen. She was embarrassed beyond measure; she thought that Vernon had lost sight of the fact that she was writing, and not he himself; and she was an unwilling listener to the secrets of that proud heart, and interrupted him by reminding him that his letter was too much of a personal nature for her to continue writing it. "You forget, that I know nothing," she began,—but she was not allowed to proceed, for Vernon silenced her with words which rendered her mute.

"No, Sybil, I do not forget anything; an irresistible impulse leads me to tell you that part of my life's history, which I have more than once alluded to in your presence, and to which you are a stranger. I know not why it is that I thus make you the confidant of my most sacred experiences; I know not if your eyes are gentle and

compassionate,—and yet they *must* be, Sybil ; I know not why I am led to unfold my inner nature to the scrutiny of a young girl who knows nothing of the world and its passions,—but it would seem that a kind of fate, from which there is no escape, drives me on, and it is your destiny to listen.”

“Florence Percy,” he continued, after a slight pause, “is my sister’s dearest friend ; it was natural then, that with such a tie between them, I should be constantly thrown into her society. She was an orphan with no one to guide her but an aunt, whose life was one tissue of fashionable folly. When I say that Florence was a fit scholar for so apt a teacher, I exaggerate nothing ; but unaware of her faults at the time when I first made her acquaintance, her beauty—which is fitting for a queen—and her winning manners, captivated me, and made me her willing slave. The old proverb says, that ‘Love is blind,’ but more blind than I am now bodily was I to her defects ; mad and blind until,—but I will not anticipate, Sybil, you shall hear the story from beginning to end.

“Florence was poor and yet she loved wealth better than life itself ; ‘rather die,’ I doubt not was her motto, ‘than be deprived of certain luxuries and comforts.’ To struggle to keep up appearances was her one great object, and she was determined that her impoverished and aristocratic race should yet flourish through her means among the wealthy of the land.

“She chose me, then, as her instrument, her victim,—and threw her wiles around my unsuspecting nature. I need not tell you that I am rich, you must see it by the style in which I live, by my retinue of servants, and my

lavish expenditure of money, and she knew it—knew my income, and laid her plans.

“We met almost daily in my sister’s house, and as it was her great ambition that Florence and I should eventually be married, we had many opportunities of becoming conversant with each other’s tastes and opinions. Isabel loved and loves Florence with a blind infatuation which is second only to what mine was, although I must do her the justice to say, that she never knew the extent of the plot laid by her fascinating friend.

“When I look back upon that eventful period of my life, it seems to me that I must have been living in a dream not to have discovered the base motives which actuated the conduct of Florence. Affection for me she had not; cold, passionless, calculating, I scarcely think that any one could inspire her with love, and yet what a masterpiece of acting was her feigned joy in my presence, while she had but one passion; to that she bowed as a heathen to his idol, and that passion was to lift the fallen fortunes of the Percy family.

“I have sometimes in my earlier years dreamed that I might be loved—dreamed of a home where a gentle wife, with loving children at her feet, would greet me at my fireside; that that home would be little short of a heaven, while Florence Percy would be the angel of my Paradise; but, alas! how was I mistaken! Sybil, look at me, is there anything chilling or repulsive about me? Now, indeed, there may be with these closed sightless eyes,—but fancy me in the prime of youth and health, with a happy buoyant temperament, think you not that *then* I might have inspired love?”

He waited not for Sybil’s answer, but hurried on.

"I remember the time when the truth first came to me,—not with the crash of a storm, crushing me with its suddenness,—but with only a certain foreshadowing of evil. We were not publicly engaged, the word had not been quite spoken, for we were waiting for her aunt's return from Europe to sanction our love, but she expected the question to be asked which would make her my betrothed, and I intended it. I had told her, however, that I loved her, and I had heard the blessed words that I was in return beloved by her; I had pictured our future home, where, not the least among the changes that were to happen to me, I was to become, under her guidance, a useful pious man. She had received many presents from my hands of great value, and had worn diamonds which were my gift. In the meantime our mornings were spent together, and our evenings in the round of amusements that a crowded city always affords.

"One day we were seated in Isabel's luxurious parlor, with the light of the room softened to that mellow shade which is so becoming to a complexion like hers, and I had never seen the beauty of Florence displayed to such advantage; I even mutely thanked God for the creation of such wondrous perfection, and that I was permitted to behold it. I have not told you that she was a clear brunette, and that the crowning grace to her fair face was a rich glowing color on her cheeks, which gave additional lustre to her superb eyes. On the morning of which I am speaking, she was dressed simply, yet carefully, while her glossy dark hair, unadorned, was to me more beautiful than if encircled with a diadem of brilliants. In passing I must mention that her dress usually was anything but



simple, for her love of display showed itself forcible in her toilet arrangements.

"Her quiet morning robe, with its loose hanging sleeves, disclosed an arm which was faultless in its proportions,—and as she held it towards me that I might clasp around it a ruby bracelet of curious workmanship, her eyes,—ah, those glorious eyes—beamed with the light of what I thought was love—deep, unchangeable, grateful love to the donor, but which circumstances have showed to be only the love of gems and of display.

"Lovers are proverbially eloquent, and I was picturing to her how her affection brightened my life, and how I wished that all our days might be as tranquil and happy as that which was passing, when she whispered in return that it would be the study of her existence to make me happy, and that she had no wish in life which was not breathed in reference to *me*! Emboldened by this delicious confession, I told her playfully that I would put her upon trial, and then altering my tone to a serious one, I remarked that she had it in her power to grant me a favor,—a speck in comparison with the sacrifices of a lifetime. It was only this,—that, instead of attending a famous ball which was to be given in the evening, she would spend the hours at home quietly with me.

"An almost imperceptible frown passed over her brow as I said these simple and not very exacting words; but the smile that succeeded was more brilliant for the sudden shadow that had preceeded it, and with all the apparent love of a loving heart gathered in her earnest eyes, which looked straight into mine, as I knelt before her, with her lips all rosy in their freshness, and her voice tender with affectionate words, she bent towards

me, and laying her perfect hand upon mine, promised what I had asked.

"Just then Isabel entered from a walk, glowing with health and excitement, and full of some important intelligence. I can scarcely think that she meant to pain me by what followed, and I can attribute her words only to that fearful proclivity which women have to making conquests, and in having those in whom they are interested count their triumphs in numbers.

"‘I have glorious news for you, Florence,’ she said, ‘you have gained another conquest by that queenly beauty of yours; you have made Lord Cummings your slave for life. He could talk of nothing else this morning but your superb air, your divine eyes, and the midnight gleaming of your ebon locks. To be sure, it is in rather a vulgar way that he swears you are an angel, but that we must excuse in a titled man; by-the-by, with a little French expletive, he made me promise to take you to Mrs. Maitland’s to-night, and you must go,’—then turning to me as I made a gesture of impatience, she continued: ‘Now, Richard, for shame, I verily believe you are jealous; my lord is awkward, you are refined and graceful; my lord is a fright, and you, you know, are a beauty;’ then warbling a lively air, she threw herself at the feet of Florence in a beseeching attitude.

"I *was* jealous, maddened,—but I kept silence and waited for the result, incensed against the presumptuous stranger, but secure in the constancy of my peerless Florence, upon whom I gazed, almost sure of her reply. What had transformed her so? Her cheeks glowed with a crimson which I had never yet seen kindled

there; her eyes sparkled with delight, and she uttered a joyous exclamation; then, as if remembering herself, she said to Isabel, 'But it is not so easy to meet him at Mrs. Maitland's, for I have just promised Richard to stay at home with him,—Darby and Joan fashion!'

"Should you indeed like to go?" I said calmly, though with a volcano raging within my heart. 'If you would, pray do not consider yourself bound to me, and do not let a whim of mine keep you at home.'

"Oh, if it is only a whim,' she returned, twisting my bracelet-gift upon her arm with her long slender fingers that she might examine it more minutely, 'then I *would* like to go.'

"As you please,' said I coldly,—*and she went!* and so the first link was broken,—and so, at length, were all. Yes, she went to the ball and met my Lord Cummings. His fortune, the world said, doubled mine; he wore finer diamonds; he sported carriages and horses unequalled in the land; he paid his court to the queenly beauty, and was accepted. It was then, that with a constitution predisposed, by the excitement under which I labored, to fever, I was taken ill with an epidemic which was raging, and which, though it affected many only slightly, prostrated me almost to the grave, and left me blind, with no hope of restoration to sight.

"After my recovery from this illness, many friends came kindly to break the monotony of my darkened chamber, and among others a young man, who had been sported with awhile by Miss Percy, and then rejected. This man I *know* to be true, and partly in bitterness of spirit—but chiefly in revenge for the treatment he had received, for men are affected differently by a rejection,

some turning to melancholy, some maddened and reckless, and others careless and light-hearted still—he, in revenge, and ignorant of my attachment to Florence, told me, wantonly and only to show her off in the worst possible light, of a speech that he had heard her make; it was this, mark it, Sybil, and it will be a key to the character of the woman who might have been my wife: ‘Well, what matters it? Though he has lost his sight, he has not lost his fortune!’

“From that moment my love turned into scorn, my scorn to indifference. You may like to hear the sequel; my Lord Cummings proved to be an adventurer, a fortune-hunter, and he had mistaken Florence for a cousin of hers who was an heiress. When he found out his mistake, he disappeared no one knows whither, and Florence was left to her own wholesome reflections. Since then she has not been much sought in society; but still her glorious beauty remains to dazzle a few lingering worshippers, who, however, have the misfortune to be too poor to be rewarded by her hand.

“I have not met her since her engagement to Cumming, but strange to say, Isabel is devoted to her, and even dreams of her being my wife and her sister; and she in her turn repays Isabel by her admiration and flattery.

“I have suffered, you see, Sybil, almost more than my share, and you must bear with my mood when you think that I am morose and gloomy; sometimes, indeed, I may be both naturally, but oftener that selfish depression of spirits under which you see me laboring, is the memory of the past, rising up in wave after wave of bitter feeling, which will not be stilled by any endeavor

on my part. You wished the other day for some misfortune, some temptation to ripple the calm current of your days. Oh, Sybil, you know not what you asked. But I am sure that you need no experience in suffering in order to make you feel for others, and sympathise with them in their sorrows,—and the thought of this is why I disclose mine to you.”

Sybil drew a long breath, and the tears came into her eyes; she had wept over romances often, but here, before her, was a man who had loved and suffered; here was something real, something that she knew was true, and she looked pityingly upon one who had now in her eyes assumed the dignity of a hero. She longed to show him in some way how truly she felt for him in his double bereavement, but knew not how.

“Sybil, tell me,” asked Vernon anxiously, “is not mine a tale of many sorrows? Come near me, and say to me that you think that I am not to be disappointed in you, too. I want no maledictions showered upon the head of Florence Percy; I care not even to bring to mind the thought of her terrible retribution, or that Dante has placed in the ‘lowest deep of the lowest deep’ those who have betrayed trust: only speak to me,—say one word of comfort, one earnest word. Sybil, friend, sister, fail me not now, but give me what I need more than parched traveller a cooling draught,—give me your sympathy.”

Sybil rose and approached him where he sat, and then with no syllable of comfort but with a heavy sob and shower of tears upon his outstretched hands, she wept because he had suffered so; and Vernon was grateful for those tears, and understood their meaning almost better



than if they had been words. He had never seen Florence weep,—her artificial nature had never been thus moved, and he knew that the fount of feeling which was the source of tears must be deep indeed.

“Poor child!” he said, as Sybil knelt before him, her hands clasped in his; “I did not mean to move you so, you must weep no more,—at least not for me, but you must spare your tears for your future self; for suffering is the condition under which we live and breathe, and you know not what the coming years may have in store for you.”

But Sybil still wept on; the sight of that disappointed, blind, forsaken man, was a deeper tragedy than what the books ever told her of—a story whose last page ended very sadly.

Then Vernon smoothed back her long luxuriant hair tenderly, and drew her nearer to him until he felt her breath upon his bowed face, and a passionate prayer for her welfare escaped from his lips. “Oh, God,” he said, “spare her, shield her; let not my fate be hers; pour upon *me* any amount of suffering, but let misfortune pass *her* by, and, above all, guard her against a sorrow such as mine.”

Vernon prayed—it was something unusual; not indeed for himself did he pray, but for Sybil, kneeling before him, her bright face uplifted to his, and her hands fast locked in his strong grasp; then her voice broke the silence which followed that earnest appeal to a higher power, and it came to his ears like the voice of an angel answering his prayer.

“*I would take your sorrow from you, if I could,*” she said, “*and bear it for you.*”

What could mortal ask more than this, what need had he of closer sympathy? Life could record no instance of greater sacrifice than such as she had offered.

“God, I thank thee,” he exclaimed, while his frame trembled at those simple words from the kneeling girl, “thou hast at last sent to me what my soul has most needed through three long dreary years,—the *gift of perfect sympathy*.” But even as Vernon spoke, a bright crimson flushed his face, and a terrible revelation came to him; he loved her—loved her kneeling and weeping there. The truth came like a knife, cleaving heart and brain; no doubt no shadow of suspicion of the nature of his feelings came to question him as to their sincerity. Florence he had loved for her beauty, and what she might have been to him when the gloss of fashion had given place to domestic ties,—but Sybil he loved for herself, for *what she was*. She might be as beautiful as an angel, or almost repulsive in appearance; these considerations did not affect him; he only saw the purity of her heart and loved her,—ah, how fondly, how truly, she must never know. He would never, he said to himself, be so ungenerous as to throw himself with his blindness and blighted life, his soured temper and uncongenial disposition, upon her mercy; no, he would not sacrifice upon the shrine of his selfishness that young budding life, that pure lovely heart; to keep his affection all untold, to educate her, to bestow upon her every grace that wealth could bring, and then to yield her calmly in after years to another with the outward quietness of a brother, even when there would be a mad worship burning on the altar of his heart within, would be the crowning suffering of his life, his last terrible sacrifice.

But love, love,—man is impotent when entering the lists against thee, and what a tyrant thou art! Vernon struggled bravely and well, but there came hours in that long and intimate intercourse when his secret would rush from his heart to his very lips, and only by strong persevering will be kept prisoner there, and each day and month grew with a mighty strength that pure devoted passion for one who, he had determined, should be to him *for ever*, as far as word or act of his was concerned, only *his well-beloved sister, his little Sybil Gray*.

But to return to the systematic development of our story. The sheet lay unfinished on the table; with one strong effort of self-control, he put her, whom he longed to clasp to his beating, lonely, yearning heart, away from him, and requested her calmly to finish it. Sybil obeyed, and wrote again at his dictation, folded, sealed, and directed the letter half mechanically, wondered in her young and innocent heart at the baseness of Florence, wiped her tear-stained face, and then left Vernon to attend to the wants of her grandmother.



## CHAPTER IX.

"Am I in Italy? Is this the Mincius?  
Are those the distant turrets of Verona?  
And shall I sup where Juliet at the masque  
Saw her loved Montague, and now sleeps by him?  
Such questions hourly do I ask myself;  
And not a stone, in a cross-way, inscribed  
'To Mantua'—'To Ferrara'—but excites  
Surprise and doubt, and self-congratulation.  
O Italy, how beautiful thou art!"

ROGERS.

SYBIL saw with heart-felt anguish that Mrs. Gordon drooped daily more and more; she was, of course, under the care of a physician who paid her regular visits, but hers was a decay of nature which no physician could heal. Her seat by the fireside, or by the open window in the more genial days of summer, had been exchanged for her own apartment, and Sybil noticed with regret, that her mind, which had been for so long a time firm and energetic, was showing unmistakable signs of decay and imbecility.

Her memory, too, which had been so well stored with dates and anecdotes of the past, failed from day to day, and she scarcely seemed to be conscious of those around her who ministered to her hourly wants. The most cheering view of her decline was, that she suffered no pain, but Sybil would often retire to the retreat of her

own room with tearful eyes when she saw that her grandmother failed to recognise her, or called her by her mother's name, or by that of some friend of her childhood.

Although Mrs. Gordon had ceased to recognise her grandchild, and knew no difference between her kind attentions and those of the domestic, Sybil's constant ministrations ceased not; she always dedicated to her the larger part of her mornings, and reserved her afternoons for her daily walks with Vernon, while her evenings alone were devoted to study. Faithful to each avocation she proved, and Vernon looked forward with scarcely restrained impatience through his long solitary mornings to those sweet hours of converse, which were characterized by subjects always earnest and instructive, as the happy period of his long and weary day.

A singular state of things had arisen from the part which Sybil had played as amanuensis, for Linwood, in reply to Sybil's letter dictated by Vernon, had addressed his answer to her. This arrangement was agreeable to him in many respects; first, because he knew that she had never been in Europe, and therefore would not be wearied when what he saw there was his theme, and moreover, because his warm genial heart longed for sympathy, and to the so-called child whom Vernon had described as quick and intelligent, he thought that he might write without reserve, and by that means please Vernon by imparting to her some of his experiences in the world of art.

As far as Vernon was concerned, he was quite satisfied with the correspondence between his friend and Sybil, and this state of things seemed quite natural to him; he thought of Linwood only as engrossed in his love of the

occupation he had chosen, without any other of the emotions incident to human nature, and contrary to Linwood's expectations, he heard with pleasure the letters read, although it was all to him beaten ground. Besides it was a positive pleasure to him to recall the scenes which he had visited and enlarge upon them to Sybil, who, with ever-ready attention, listened with increasing interest to the descriptions of that land which is the day-dream of aspiring girlhood.

At first these letters were simple and formal, and then when Sybil's answers, which were no longer dictated by Vernon, came, showing such a just appreciation of what he had written, and such an interest in all that he saw, such a knowledge of the details of art, and above all so pure a religious faith, Linwood's day was not happily ended unless he had written in his journal to his "little friend;" and soon the words "little friend" were changed to "Sybil," and "dear Sybil," and theories, opinions, and faiths, were discussed, and had they seen and been well acquainted with each other, there could not have been more perfect confidence between two friends of different sexes.

The change came on so gradually that to the correspondents it appeared perfectly natural, while Vernon, deceived like those most concerned, regarded the letters as being merely intended for him, a very agreeable journal of passing events mingled with other subjects of interest, and did not perceive that each "white-winged messenger," sent across the Atlantic, carried a chain with it that linked the young artist and Sybil, with her gentle and loving nature, nearer and yet nearer together.

"Another letter from Mr. Linwood!" said Sybil one

morning, dropping a bouquet of choice flowers to the ground in her eagerness to receive it, "just what we were wishing for! There is no *small* pleasure *so great* in life as the breaking of a seal, which secures from all other eyes words meant alone for one's very self."

Vernon smiled at her delight, and fully as anxious as herself to hear the contents, besought her to lose no time in reading them.

"What a fine correspondent he has after all proved," said he; "you know that I told him never to write except when he was very happy or very wretched, but this I think is his fifth letter."

Yes, five letters had passed between Linwood and Sybil; a dangerous number for hearts so young, so sympathising as theirs!

Sybil read—

"You do not write like a child, dear Sybil, though Vernon calls you one, and I shall persist in taking you with me in imagination to places into which a child would not care to enter, for you appreciate my descriptions so fully, that I feel encouraged to unfold to you more of my wanderings than I would alone to that hard cynical guardian of yours, but I hope that he will condescend to listen to them sometimes, and you must assure him, that whether he desires it or not, he is always included in what I say and feel.

"What would I not give to have you both here with me to-day, that we might journey through this thrice beautiful Italy together! I would lead you to its lakes, and lingering around their magic shores, we would build an air-castle of life there, amid their beautiful scenery, their villas and terraces, their varied trees and picturesque people. Then I would take you by the hand and stand with you in the cathedral of Milan, which some traveller from our own country has declared he would rather bring to his native land than anything else in Europe, and we would feel together that it is a temple of God whatever faith it symbolizes, and from your child-heart a prayer would arise, finding

its way through its gold and silver, its niches and statuary, to the Christian's home of prayer.

"I would have you pause before Da Vinci's Last Supper, and sigh with me over its defaced condition, and then upon Raphael's Spolazio, that exquisite gem of highest art. These we certainly would not omit in our pleasure tour.

"Then we would haste to Venice (no, we would not *haste* in Italy), and under its skies, in its mysterious streets, to the dipping of oars, you should sing for Vernon and me, with your best accent, some of Italia's own songs. (Are your eyes dark, Sybil, like those of her children?) Then as you see the church of St. Mark's, your voice would be hushed, yourself bewildered by its peculiar beauty, in which the architect has seemed to defy all criticism.

"From thence I would guide you to the feet of the master-painters of Venice, Titian and Paul Veronese, and many another saint of art, to drink in the beauty of their undying creations. Then we would stand in Verona at Juliet's tomb, and Vernon, with his deep exquisite voice, would bring Shakspeare to our memory, and under the influence of the almost inspired words we would give a sigh to buried love and constancy, and pass on.

"Then, Sybil, you would forgive me, if with an artist's worship of such things, I lead you to Parma and Correggio's creations, to his Holy Family and tender Magdalen, and forward to the galleries of Bologna to follow the flights of the immortal Guido in his Sampson and his Crucifixion, and on to the Saint Agnes of Domenichino, and the Saint Cecilia of Raphael, and lastly, over the Appenines to beautiful Florence.

"Were you weary, dear Sybil, with your long and eventful journey, we would pause to rest upon the hill of Fiesole and mark the beauties of the city as it lies stretching out before us like a panorama; then entering near the Palazzo, we would gaze upon the Fountain of Neptune, and in the Tribune pause before the Venus, the Knife-Grinder, and the Wrestlers.

"Arrived at last at the Gallery, where La Fornarina holds her undisputed sway, I should depend upon your fresh unbiassed impressions to recall to Vernon's memory the beauties of Raphael and Titian by your descriptions.

"But, Sybil, you must not expect me to conduct you in one letter

over the whole of Italy, or even Florence alone; the path that I have marked out to you in this single epistle, if faithfully trodden, would consume a year, and in Florence itself one could spend years with perfect satisfaction. What mad devotion to science did I think it once, when I heard a naturalist declare that he could remain, with profit to himself, on a desolate island for months, examining the habits of a single fish; perhaps you would say that I am as thorough a fanatic, were I to tell you that in the study of a single picture by one of the great masters, I could consume a much longer time in Florence.

"Vernon is more cheerful, then? Who could refrain from being cheerful were he living in the sunny atmosphere which seems to surround a certain Sybil Gray? A heavy trust is yours, my little friend; guard and guide him well. God, for some wise purpose has afflicted him; let us not dare to try to lift the curtain which conceals the purposes of a higher power, but bend humbly to his will.

"I forgot to mention that you must not be surprised, if at some time during the latter part of this year I drop down upon you as from the skies, for at times the Switzer's own longing for his native land comes heavily upon me, and I feel that there is no cure but to see my own home once more.

"Think of me sometimes, dear child, as striving to be and to do good, or I should not be worthy of a place in your pure heart."

It would be almost superfluous to say that Sybil read these letters of Linwood's with intense pleasure, but it must be understood that they were not always of the character of that which has been transcribed above. Sometimes a single epistle was filled with a description of only one work of art, and then again one would scarcely have imagined, from the entire absence of all allusions to such things, that Albert was a stranger in a strange land, for books criticised, people commented upon, and theories discussed, formed the prominent part of his correspondence, and Linwood's written communications really educated Sybil as much as the verbal teachings of Vernon and her masters.

## CHAPTER X.

"I will away  
And gather balm from a sweet forest walk !  
There, as the breezes through the branches sweep,  
Is heard aerial minstrelsy, like harps  
Untouched, unseen, that on the spirit's ear  
Pour out their numbers 'till they lull in peace  
The tumult of the bosom."

HANNAH GOULD.

"On the road—the lonely road,  
Under the cold white moon,  
Under the ragged trees he strode ;—  
There was a step, timed with his own,  
A figure that stooped and bowed ;  
A broad white knife, that gleamed and shone  
Like a splinter of daylight downward thrown,  
And the moon went under a cloud."

As Vernon became more accustomed to the loss of his sight, and the night in which he groped the footpaths more familiar, and the strange horror of entire darkness less painful, he relinquished occasionally the companionship of an attendant, and learned to love the deep solitude of the woods, taking a kind of pride in being able to dispense with the surveillance which always seemed to him to be inseparable from the guidance of his servant. But just as he congratulated himself upon his freedom, an event occurred which made him realize to the full extent his helplessness, and that though of almost

Herculean proportions, his strength now availed him nothing. This lesson he learned, and also with it another, of infinitely more importance; he learned that he had advanced one step towards self-government, and that his pride of character, which was one of his besetting sins, was, in a measure, subdued by the incident which is about to be related.

On the outskirts of Vernon's land, near the open road, there lay a spring, surrounded by a rustic construction in a most romantic dell, over which hung large, drooping, forest trees, shutting out the sunlight and making it a quiet and secluded place. The lulling sound of the tinkling water, as it coursed over the pebbles in a succession of endless rivulets, was music to Vernon's ear, and feeling quite at home there, he would dismiss his servant until some stated hour, when either he, or Sybil, freed from her attendance upon her grandmother, sought him and conducted him home. The early stars or twilight moon often found him dreaming there, and his calmest hours of contemplation were spent in this favorite spot.

One evening as William Banks, the boy whom Vernon so unfeelingly had caused to be punished, was returning to his home, rather later than usual from his work, he noticed a man of suspicious appearance lingering around the precincts of the spring, and as he was evidently a stranger, he concluded that he could be there for no good purpose, and cautiously following his footsteps, he soon thought that he had discovered the object which had brought him to the place. The man, with noiseless tread, parted the thick branches which grew interlaced around the spring, and peering in, seemed, by the



expression of his countenance, satisfied with what he saw therein, and soon disappeared closely followed by William, who, the instant that he had command of the scene unfolded to him, stopped for farther enlightenment as to the intruder's intention.

He saw that Vernon lay on the soft moss-crowned bank in a deep sleep, the moon lighting up his whole figure, and that the man, stepping forward, approached him softly, bending at length over him, as if to ascertain if he were really quite unconscious of his presence. Then William saw farther that he drew a knife from his belt and laid it upon the mound beside him, ready it would appear, to use in an emergency; next the watcher beheld him deliberately kneel by Vernon, and with some sharp instrument sever his watch from the chain, at last proceeding to rifle his pockets.

The spectator of this strange bold proceeding, stood for a moment passionless and unmoved—there was a memory in his heart which had been burnt there, he feared never to be effaced, it was simply a *disgrace*, which he, the helpless one, at the mercy of a robber and an assassin, had brought upon him who was a witness of the scene before him, and he felt that he was at last avenged, but it was only for a moment; his better nature returned to him and he acted accordingly.

Watching his opportunity, and he had to be circumspect, feeling that though he was a strong tall lad, he was no match for an experienced ruffian, with a knife at his command, he leapt suddenly down into the ravine, and snatching up the knife, which he threw some distance away, caught hold of the kneeling robber's arms, and pinioning them from behind, forcibly held him down.

With a terrible oath the man tried to extricate himself, and Vernon awoke only to grope about bewildered and alarmed. In a voice almost inaudible from the effort, very nearly beyond his strength, which he was making to keep the struggling man in his grasp, William made him understand the state of things, and Vernon, grateful to his rescuer, but unable to be of any service to him, had no other alternative than to call loudly to his servant, whom he expected momentarily. It would be impossible to describe the tumult of the feeling raging in Vernon's breast as he stood there in his helplessness. Once, it would not have been thus; trained to feats of strength, surpassing all his companions in agility and skill, and in all that called forth muscular power, stalwart, tall, and commanding, with a breadth of chest that seemed as if it would defy the blows that most men might be able to give it, he chafed like a caged lion, a very Sampson, in an angry inward struggle, but this agony of endurance availed him nothing. Happily, John was at no great distance, and hastened promptly to the spot, where, with the assistance of William, whose strength was now nearly overspent, he succeeded in securing the man.

He was a hardened-looking ruffian, this intruder upon that peaceful glen, and Vernon discovered that he had but lately been dismissed from the county jail, and becoming acquainted with his secluded habits, had determined to replenish his purse from Vernon's before venturing into the world again. The man, in his confession, owned his intention of killing his victim had he made any resistance, but William's sudden appearance had defeated all his plans. It was thus that the boy, so persecuted once, found himself suddenly raised to a position of importance,

but he looked for no reward or favor from him, who had so cruelly denied all favors at a time when he needed them much more than in the present instance.

When Sybil heard of Vernon's providential escape, her whole soul lifted itself in thankful prayer to God for his preservation, but when she learned to whom he had been indebted for his safety, and life perhaps, a glow of triumph lit up her face, for she had long felt a security in the boy's rectitude of character, and she was curious to know how Vernon would act towards his deliverer. Her interest in William Banks had been of no negative sort, for ever since his disgrace she had been a constant visitor at his mother's cottage, and in her own gentle way, she had soothed the inmates there by telling them that a first step towards evil was often the last, and that *she* had not lost confidence in the offender if he felt contrition for what he had done, and by timely counsel and gifts of books and needful clothing she won the love and respect of the household, and the right to speak encouragingly to the boy. Now she felt that her trust had not been misplaced, for it was this apparent, entire forgetfulness of Vernon's punishment in defending him with so much bravery, which convinced her that the lad was not utterly depraved, and that she had not sown the good seed of advice and sympathy in vain.

With a strange eager interest she waited for some demonstration of gratitude upon Vernon's part, but that reserve which he knew so well how to assume, was an effectual barrier to everything like confidence, and thus a week passed, a miserable week to Sybil, who feared that, among other faults of character which beset her adopted brother, foremost would be ranked that of in-

gratitude; but at the end of the week rather a formal summons from Vernon for her to come to him in the library, made her anticipate that it would lead to some course of action on his part, which would clear him from this new charge.

"Something is to be done about this lad, this William Banks," he said as she entered his presence, "you know it and I know it, Sybil, what must it be?"

Sybil spoke out boldly for the boy.

"Do what the noble part of your nature bids you," she said.

"What! send for this cottager, this boy who but two years ago"——

"Stop, Mr. Vernon," said Sybil, arresting his words with her hand laid upon his arm, "leave that unsaid; do not speak about what he has been, but what he is."

Vernon trembled under that light touch, and that gentle rebuke.

"Well, then," he continued, "you would have me send for this cottager, I know it, though you have not said one word to influence me, but I feel it here in my heart, Sybil, and tell him that I owe him my life, that his bravery was unparalleled, his presence of mind extraordinary, and besides this, you would have me reward him by some post of trust and honor—is it not so, Sybil?"

His voice softened as he spoke, and Sybil caught his hand gratefully—since eye could not reply to eye, it was but another way of showing her approval of what he had said.

"You refer this all to me, Mr. Vernon," she said, "but you know it emanated from what is honorable in your—"

self, and if you do it, it will be just what is right and just what is noble."

Vernon smiled, but his lip quivered too, as if some new and blessed experience were stirring the very depths of his soul.

"Send for the lad, Sybil," he said at last, "here and at once!"

A second time was William the cottager sent for to the house of Vernon Grove, but under what different circumstances! The boy advanced with a modest, though not downcast look into the hall, where Vernon and Sybil stood to meet him, the former holding out his hand to welcome him, but he scarcely understood the action in that cold proud man, and Sybil taking the hand of each, placed them one within the other.

"I owe my life to you, William," said Vernon in gentle tones—"a young man of your age, and just entering manhood, needs sometimes a helping hand to lead him on to success; you must look upon me as your friend, and tell me your wants. Would you like to go to the city and earn a livelihood there, or would you rather be advanced to some station of trust here in the country? Only let me know your wishes and they shall be gratified by one who, when in a passionate mood, was not generous enough to make an allowance for a first youthful fault."

A thrill swept through the chords of Sybil's heart;—surely this was not the Vernon she had known, once so unforgiving and tyrannical, nor did she wonder at the glow of pride that lit the upturned face of the lad as he listened to Vernon's noble words.

"You thought that you were acting right," returned

he, and so did your duty, sometimes I think, for the best, too; for it was my punishment after all that led Miss Gray to our cottage, and we have all been better and happier since she came. I would thank you, sir, not to allude to a reward for an act which any one with courage would have done; there is only one thing that I desire, and that is, that you would forget that I ever lost sight of my duty so far as to stoop to the wicked ways of a thief."

"I will forget it," said Vernon warmly, "only to remember that you are a noble and worthy being, and that you may count upon me as your friend for life."

Sybil lay down to rest that night with a grateful happy heart, for besides the conquest which she felt that Vernon had made over himself, he had empowered her to have the widow and her family removed to a comfortable cottage upon his own land, and William, besides overseeing his employer's affairs, was to be presented with a little farm which would yield him a certain income.

And Sybil, *Sybil*, was to be the Lady Bountiful, through whom the grand changes were to come to pass. No wonder that golden visions floated about her in her dreams, and that her day thoughts were surrounded with a rosy halo, for she was tasting a new pleasure, and that through Vernon's kindness, the luxury of practically doing good.

## CHAPTER XI.

"Oh! watch me, watch me still  
Thro' the long night's dreary hours;  
Uphold, by thy firm will,  
Worn Nature's sinking powers.


While yet *thy* face is there  
(The loose locks round it flying),  
So young, and fresh, and fair,  
I feel not I am dying.

But while those pitying eyes  
Are bending thus above me,  
In vain the death-dews rise,—  
Thou dost regret and love me!

Thy fond and pitying smile  
Shall soothe my painful waking,  
Thy voice shall cheer me while  
The slow grey dawn is breaking."

MRS. NORTON.

THE shock that Vernon had sustained, together with his sleep in the damp neighborhood of the spring, were more disastrous in their consequences than could at first have been imagined; for one afternoon shortly after, when Sybil came into the parlor equipped for a walk, she found him lying upon a couch with a flush like that of fever upon his face. He was seldom ill, and his powerful frame and strong athletic limbs looked as if they could not be bound by the cords of sickness; but while



Sybil looked at him and heard his heavy irregular breathing as he lay with contracted brow, she intuitively felt that he was suffering, and questioned him. Vernon acknowledged a dull pain in his head and a burning thirst, treating the matter lightly, and making his usual preparations for his evening stroll, but a sudden faintness overtook him, and towards night his ill feelings so continued to increase, that he himself at last proposed to send for medical aid.

The physician at once declared that he was very sick, and that he required the most attentive care, and thus a new office devolved upon Sybil, who placed herself under the teaching of the housekeeper who was an excellent nurse and had attended Vernon in his former illness. With untiring footsteps she passed from her grandmother's room to his, and with her gentle ministrations relieved them both, winning many a word of approval from the more experienced nurse, who was glad of the young eyes and hopeful nature of Sybil to bear her company. The responsibility increased each moment, for Vernon grew rapidly ill, the fever raging with unabating violence, until at last he sank into utter unconsciousness.

To such anxiety of mind as Sybil now felt, she was a stranger, and the new experience bewildered her, and though she did not at first know the extent of the danger of her friend and guardian, she felt that such an illness was a terrible thing, and her heart was sorely troubled for the strong proud man who lay bereft of strength and pride, and with unfailing patience she watched and waited upon him. Sometimes she thought that if ever there could be a return for all the benefits which she had



received from him, the hour had come to give it, and that devotion on her part would be but a proper offering in exchange; but her motive at other times for thus expending her energies in watching day and night at his bedside, was only what any sick and suffering fellow-creature might expect, namely, Christian kindness and sympathy.

Up to the time of his unconsciousness he was only content when she was in his presence, and was restless and complaining when she left the room to attend to her grandmother's wants, but now that restlessness was over, the stupor which had succeeded was oblivion to all that was passing around, and at this stage of his illness Sybil had a new and unexpected trial.

The physician, who was a kind and fatherly man, called her to him one day when she thought that Vernon, from some new symptoms which had appeared, more than ever required her watchful vigils, and gently laying his hand upon her fair young head, told her that it was early in life for such trials to fall to her lot, but that he must prepare her for the worst by informing her that in all human probability Vernon would die. The disease had baffled his skill, and although he tried every endeavor to save his patient's life, still, unless some almost miraculous intervention, which he could not foresee then, interposed in the natural order of events, he said, that his patient must shortly breathe his last. He then dictated a letter to her which he told her she must send at once to Isabel, acquainting her with the sad information, but informing her at the same time that it was in her to attempt to see her brother, as long as it happened, it would be before she could

arrive at Vernon Grove. The physician knew something of Isabel's character, and felt, even had there been time, how out of place she would be by the sick man's couch, with her restlessness and worldly thoughts and manners.

Poor Sybil, she received the dreadful intelligence with a cold chill which made her speechless, but the conviction that if *she* were not calm, and did she not put on a courage which she was far from feeling, there would be none to act, gave to her appearance a quiet dignity which even deceived the kind-hearted physician, who called her a heroine, and praised her self-possession ; but could he have seen her a moment after he left her, with a death-like pallor on her countenance, and have heard the simple ejaculation, " God help me," which burst from her white and quivering lips, he would scarcely have called her a heroine then.

Still he might live, hope whispered, and if human care and attention can avail, he *must* live, she said to herself, even if her own strength and life were to ebb away by the side of Vernon's couch. What mattered it if he woke from that death-like stupor to find her dead ; ay, what mattered it ? Had he not made the world beautiful to her by his teachings, his sympathy ; what would it be without him ? Thus Sybil reasoned in behalf of her teacher, her benefactor, her brother, her friend.

The physician had told her that there was a crisis in his disease, on the other side of which lay either life or death ; scarcely the former, however, and almost certainly the latter. Should he die, he would pass away quietly and gently into another state of being, like a child going into a slumber, for there was no strength

within him to do battle with the grim tyrant; but should he live, as quietly would he wake again to earth, and its many trials, and as long as there was a ray of hope, Sybil's hope was strong. She could not, would not, believe that Vernon was about to pass away from her sight for ever; she shuddered, too, at the thought of how ill prepared he was for such a change, and fervent prayers for his recovery were unceasingly upon her lips.

On the morning after her conversation with the physician, death indeed seemed to have the mastery over life upon the body of the unconscious invalid, for his high white brow was whiter than before, and his hands seemed like ice within her own; but even then, when almost hoping against hope, a prayer burst from her lips in the fullness of her heart, and with a passion and energy which were almost foreign to her calm equable temperament, she interceded for the life of her guardian.

"Oh, my God," she said, in the simple language of her guileless heart, "spare him, spare *him* who has been to me a friend, guide, teacher, who has work upon earth yet to do, and who, though shut out from thy blessed light, still sympathises with those who enjoy what is denied to him. If thou dost take him he is in thy hands, thou art forgiving, oh God; but if in thy mercy thou dost see fit to keep him here on earth, may this new trial and suffering have brought him nearer to thee to do thy will, for with thee is life, without thee and Christ, spiritual death. Amen."

As Sybil knelt by the bedside of Vernon, her face buried in her hands, and her sobs breaking out unre-

strained from her over-burthened heart, she heard that soul-felt "Amen" echoed so softly, yet distinctly, that she started to her feet, wondering if the word had come from a spirit or from the pale lips before her. *He* had said it, he lived! He had passed from the shadow of the grave into life once more, and had heard that earnest prayer. A smile was on his face, but tears were silently coursing each other down his pallid cheeks. Softly Sybil wiped them away, and leaning over him, while trying not to show any emotion, she asked him if he needed anything, and told him calmly how great a danger he had passed, and how necessary it was to his recovery that he should not exert himself at all.

"Oh, that I *had* passed away," he murmured, "in that deep unconsciousness—it is so fearful to awake again to life, its disappointments and trials, and its *blindness*."

"Hush," said Sybil softly, laying her hand, with its velvet softness, caressingly upon his brow, "murmur not against what God has done. He may have brought you low to raise you again for some good purpose, some great joy."

*Joy for him!* Ah, that might be, he thought, if she loved him, if the voice that had called him back to life had called him back to love too, if he had youth and sight to win her for his own, but these were not the days of miracles. Remembering his vow of old, he put a check upon his thoughts and tongue, and answered her not, but his brow contracted with the effort as though spasmed with pain.

"We must not talk any more," she said, lifting the waves of bright soft hair that lay tangled upon his

brow ; "our good doctor will be here directly, and he will ask me if I have been faithful to my precious charge." Then he lay still and hushed under the heavenly spell of her gentle words and soft touch, as she smoothed into something like order the rebellious locks of his hair until she thought that he slept, and then sat down quietly, afraid to leave him and yet watching anxiously for the entrance of some one to whom she might impart the joyful tidings.

"Oh, Sybil," he said at last, with a voice of anguish and tenderness which almost betrayed his secret, "your watchfulness, your devotion, have cured me of this almost fatal fever, but there remains a pain incurable, which you know not of, here, deep, deep in my heart, which is beating for ever with the same throb of anguish; God cannot still that and bid it be calm, though He *can* give life and take it."

"Poor, tried, weary heart," she answered softly, as though she were soothing a grieved child; then dashing away the tears that would come to her eyes for very pity of his weakness, she continued earnestly, "God *can* do all things, Mr. Vernon, for those who love him; do you not remember those beautiful words, 'Tenderly his finger touches the stains of our hearts and defines the misery of our lives.' But to be loved and cared for by Him, we must love Him too. Will you not try to do this?"

"Yes, if you will teach me how, Sybil," he answered. Sybil pressed his hand, but did not answer. She felt a new joy in her heart; she might be the means of training a soul for a purer life; she was weak, truly, for the task, but God was on her side, and her reply to his

question was simply that gentle pressure which the blind man understood, and a scarcely audible prayer breathed for him, for her, *for both*.

The entrance of the physician put an end to further conversation, and it was well that he came, for the unusual excitement was anything but beneficial to Vernon.

"By almost a miracle you are raised from a very critical state to one of comparative security," he said seriously, "but your little nurse must keep you very quiet, noting the slightest change, for a relapse would be fatal in your present weak state; and any conversation long continued, or any excitement, would be apt to throw you back again."

Thus warned, Sybil did her duty to the utmost; she would neither converse herself, nor allow Vernon to engage in any conversation on his part, and a busy and important person she became, flitting like a spirit of peace from room to room, the servants looking up to her with respect, and even the old housekeeper praising her for her untiring industry and devotion. This self-abnegation had its reward, for Vernon gradually recovered his strength, and though not able to leave his room for some time, each day added fresh vigor to his wasted frame; and as gradually she felt that she was gaining a recognised influence even over that stern unbending will.

"Is Sybil here?" asked Vernon one afternoon after waking from a refreshing sleep, "yes, I know that she is, for the air is softer for her presence, there is a balmy breath floating above and around me. Yes, Sybil must be here; where is she, and what is she doing?"

"You have guessed aright," she answered playfully,

"but because you are feeling better and stronger with coming health, you must not be led away by your imaginings to pay such far-fetched compliments. I am seated by a window, sometimes looking at the last foot-prints of Winter, and sometimes reading passages from a good book."

"It is a long time since my pupil has read to me, will she read to me now? Along with this fine elastic air around me, let her voice come to me like the tuneful reed of woodland shepherd, as it did in days of yore."

Sybil half smiled at his persistent complimentary tone, then looked serious enough as her eye rested upon the book that she was holding; history, poetry, novels, science, all these had she read aloud to Vernon, but never *that*. Would he listen patiently, or would he ask for something lighter, and to his ken, better? She would try him—it was worth the trial—his displeasure was nothing compared with what she thought seemed clearly to her her duty, and unfalteringly and feelingly she read from the page which lay open upon her lap.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the

days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Sybil made no comment upon what she had read, nor did she allow Vernon to do so, for she arose and left the apartment, imagining that he had food enough for thought in the beautiful words he had heard.

The next afternoon as she was seated in the same spot with the same book before her, great was her delight at hearing Vernon request her to read aloud again, leaving her to the choice of what it should be. She chose, as she had done the day before, feeling that one step was gained, and when he bade her pause so that he might speak of the beauty of some particular passage, she knew that the ice of indifference was broken; and it came to pass that after Vernon's recovery the Bible still continued to form a part of their daily reading. Vernon listened to it, but too often as a critic, though Sybil reasoned rightly when she said to herself that even then it was a great gain, and that, perhaps, when he came "to scoff" he would "remain to pray."

As the Winter passed away and the Spring came in with joyous step, a very maiden in the first flush of youth, brightening everything she looked upon and smiling upon earth and sky, Vernon's recovery seemed established, and each day added somewhat of his old vigor to his step, each day his proud look came back more strongly marked upon his face; not the defiant look which made Sybil liken him to a tree struck by lightning, and though blasted, towering upwards to the sky, but a softened pride, as though the tree was scathed only, and struggled, erect still, for life. He was happier, far happier, too, than he had been for years, for he had a tran-



quilt security in the present which soothed and satisfied him. First he felt how exclusively Sybil was his own, at least until some one more fortunate than himself came to claim her, and again he knew that he was a better man. Gone were those quick flashes of temper which so often interfered with his peace of mind; gone was that miserable depression of spirits, which not only affected his own well-being but that of those around him, and those querulous repinings against fate had given place, if not to submission, to a quiet acquiescence in his condition, and though he was far from his ideal of a good man, and farther yet from Sybil's, still the progress was upward not downward.

It has been said that "the *heart* in waking wakes the mind," and perhaps all of Vernon's happy change of character could be traced to Sybil's influence and the strong love which had budded awhile ago, and had now burst into full flower, which he wore, truly enough, concealed; not *on* his breast but *in* it. Even granting this, Sybil might have been the instrument, the means which led on to such a desirable end. So that the change had really come, it mattered little whether Sybil's hand first touched the troubled waters, or whether an angel had looked within their depths with eyes that had power to calm. God has many ways to bring a wanderer home.

At this period of our story Mrs. Gordon remained in the same state, neither better nor worse, and Sybil was truly thankful to know that in her slow decay, though the mind was no longer active, the body of her dear relative was free from suffering, and with renewed ardor she laid plans to pursue her studies and to devote as much time

as she conscientiously could to her improvement in every branch of education, but an event occurred that entirely interrupted the even tenor of her life.

About this time a letter arrived from Isabel, full of regrets that she had been unable to leave her home at the period of Vernon's illness, congratulating him upon his recovery, and adding that as he was proof against all invitations to the city, she had determined to spend a month with him ; but dreading the loneliness of the drive, as Mr. Clayton was unable to accompany her, he must be prepared to have a friend of hers for an inmate, who had been selected by her for agreeable conversation, brilliant qualities, and in fact for all that would render a tiresome journey agreeable.

"And this friend?" asked Sybil as she finished reading Isabel's letter.

"Only some artist or poet, I suppose," answered Vernon in his turn, though concealing his fears and anxious about any addition to their happy home of one who might interest Sybil, "Isabel is always surrounded by such, who are painting her beauty or making verses about her expressive eyes, that 'underneath that calm white forehead are ever burning torrid.'"

"You have so often spoken of your sister's beauty that I have a longing to see it, just as one longs to go abroad to gaze at one particular Madonna. I wonder if the sense of her loveliness will flash upon me like sunlight, or if it will grow upon me like the coming dawn. I cannot tell yet what my ideal of beauty is, only it seems to me now that I could scarcely be said to have one. As in pictures, so in living and breathing creations of beauty, I should think that one ought to be educated to

enjoy it and to say at last, 'this or that face or form delights me.'

"And yet, Sybil," answered Vernon, "I would not have you think that Isabel, with her surpassing loveliness, is my criterion. I admired but did not enjoy her face when I could see it. Hers is a restless butterfly brilliancy, a very opal is she among the gems; her friend, Miss Percy (I can talk of her without emotion now), was once my type of the highest perfection of beauty, calm, statuesque, still, ruby-lipped, not so fair as clear and regally majestic; a rose, to the looker-on showing nothing but most gorgeous coloring, most perfect proportions, but to any one who was fortunate enough to gather and wear it, giving out the most delicious perfumes. I had my dream, you know how it was dissolved, how I did not win the rose nor wear it."

"Yes, I know, I know," said Sybil hastily, fearing that the fresh opening of the old wounds might give him pain.

"I did not win nor wear it," repeated Vernon, "nor am I the least regretful that I did not; the possession of such a regal beauty would have made me proud but not happy, and what would it have availed me now? No, Sybil, even if I could see God's daylight again, and were I seeking a wife, a companion, I would search through the world not so much for a lovely face, but a truthful one, not so much for a Juno-like form to gaze upon admiringly, as for one pliant and yielding that I could nestle in my heart of hearts, and that would feel at home there. But we have forgotten our first topic, these city guests who are accustomed to be amused all the day and half of the night; all that we can do is to

make them welcome in our quiet way, and take their visit as a dispensation by no means agreeable, and do our best under the circumstances; then you must tell the housekeeper to do hers, too, and let it be generally known among the household, and I doubt not with their memory of city habits, and your observant eyes, that everything will go on smoothly and well. And Sybil "——

"Mr. Vernon"——

"About yourself; send to the city for any addition to your wardrobe that you may need; I would have my young *protégé* looking her best in my sister's eyes."

Vernon seemed lost for a moment in deep thought, a new emotion stirred the heart of each, and Sybil was silent too. "Was she fair and bright-eyed, and would that sister look approvingly upon her, or was she otherwise?" he said to himself.

"Do I approach any of the types of beauty which he has mentioned, Mrs. Clayton's or Miss Percy's, or that other, the beauty of Truth, or am I far removed from each and all?" she thought.

"You will look your best?" at last he said again.

"As a moth flying around a star," she answered somewhat sadly, as she thought of what she had heard of Isabel and her loveliness.

"Ah! is it so then?" he asked somewhat disappointed, though scarcely daring to confess it to himself, but it was only for a moment; he loved her soul, not her perishable body.

"You said that you liked the *truthful* face best," she said timidly; "Mrs. Clayton, I trust, will find truth and sincerity in her brother's adopted sister."

“Yes, dear child, I know it as though I could see it, and it is God’s most precious seal imprinted on what He has created ; keep on the garments of truth, dear Sybil, be what you are, and the moth will not be overpowered by the lustre of the star ;” and with these kind comforting words he left her.

Many a moment of longing had Sybil before the guests arrived to flee away to her old cottage home, but she gradually overcame her timidity when she saw that no responsibility whatever would fall upon her, for the well-trained servants and excellent housekeeper soon had everything in readiness, and even seemed to apply themselves with additional alacrity to their preparations at the prospect of the monotony of their quiet life being broken by Mrs. Clayton and her attendants, and at last she not only became reconciled herself to the looked-for innovation, but anxious for it too.

## CHAPTER XII.

"With silken coats and caps, and golden rings,  
With ruffs and cuffs, and farthingales and things."

"Oh, to see or hear her singing! scarce I know which is divinest—  
For her looks sing too—she modulates her gestures to the tune;  
And her mouth stirs with the song, like song; and when the notes  
are finest,

'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light, and seem to swell them on."

MRS. BROWNING.

ON the day appointed, the party from the city arrived, but an hour sooner than was expected. Sybil had taken a walk, and Vernon alone remained to receive them.

Isabel loved her brother as much as such a heart as hers could love, with its evil impulses unchecked, and its good ones not encouraged, and rushing into his arms, she covered his face with kisses. Hers was a changeful nature, flickering with lights and shadows; not, perhaps, wilfully sinful, but too faulty to inspire much respect; she would do a grievous wrong to a friend, who, disgusted at once with her levity and inconsistency, determined to avoid her ever after; but in another instant some kind act of Isabel's, and her lovely winning smile, effaced all remembrance of her folly. Such a character is not an uncommon one, and it is impossible to harbor resentment long against these April-like beings, who have tears as well as sunshine at command. It was no

wonder, then, that Vernon, remembering that she was his sister, the only tie of blood that he had upon earth, and that they had been parted for years, returned her affectionate caresses with an almost equal warmth.

"And now," said Isabel, gracefully disengaging herself from his arms, "you must not neglect your other guest—give me your hand, Richard, and let your heart go with it in a welcome."

He gave it, and felt it placed by her in another hand, a beautiful hand, but not like Sybil's. A shudder crept over him as he felt its clasp. It was one that he had pressed before, and cared never to press again. No, it was not like Sybil's any more that the heart was like Sybil's. The hand of the one was perfect in its proportions, like that of a statue, and artists had moulded their finest creations from its form; the fingers were tapered to a point, the well-shaped nail polished to glossiness, but a certain hardness like the marble which it copied, a coldness, met your touch; but Sybil's hand was soft, tremulous, yielding, and warm, with a palm like the faint blush of a rose leaf; one felt truth there, but in that other hand, lying in Vernon's, there was none.

"Florence Percy," said Isabel, but she might have left the words unuttered, for Vernon knew it before they were said, and he stammered out something which he hoped sounded like a polite welcome,—but was it? Scarcely.

"Yes, I knew that you would be glad to see us, Richard, I told Florence so, and assured her that you had not forgotten those happy hours of the past," said Isabel. "I did my very best to bring Clayton with us, but he resisted all my fascinations; I even tried to charm

back his romance, and talked touchingly of the woods and streams, but all in vain, and so I concluded to yield myself gracefully to the inevitable fate of coming without him. He is just as good, Richard, just as indulgent as ever, and has such a pleasant way of being obstinate that one cannot get angry with him. The day before we came I actually forced some tears into my eyes, by way of additional inducement, to show him how I longed for his company, but he either did not or would not notice them, and dried them most effectually by saying in a tone, entirely divested of all romance, that he could not come because he had some grand speculation on hand which would yield him, if attended to, several thousands; and then by way of comfort for my disappointment, he said that he supposed I wanted a new *robe de chambre* for the country, some unostentatious jewelry which would not dazzle the dwellers of Arcadia, and before I could answer no, he poured a handful of gold into my lap and departed. That is always the way he treats me, and often when I know that I deserve a scolding, for some giddy act of mine, he blesses me instead; but I must end with what I began, and tell you how it comes to pass that Florence is here. I did not want to bring with me any of the lords of creation, for the effort to entertain them with no externals but the skies and fields would have annihilated me. Nothing remained then but to bring some one with me who is so agreeable, and so chimes in with all that is beautiful in art and nature, that she would but seem as a part of the fine landscapes, while I might enjoy her society as such; so I looked around, and, lo, Florence appeared and came."



"She forgot to say, however," said Florence in return, "that she herself is *the sun* which brightens the landscapes, and everything around."

Isabel thanked her friend with a gratified smile, for flattery was the food that she loved, and Florence knew it.

"We have been talking so busily," she resumed "that I had quite forgotten I meant to look about upon the beauties and conveniences of your house before we went to our rooms. Really, you are no anchorite after all, living in a hut on bread and water, but have a most charming habitation here, which breathes unmistakably of civilization. There is one thing, however, in your *ménage* which astonishes me, and that is that you are content to live here year after year with no one but servants and that superannuated sickly dame and her rustic grandchild. It is bad taste, to say the least of it, but you are not utterly lost to taste and refinement, Richard, as one can see by your pictures. What an exquisite Raphael that is; did you ever behold anything so soul touching as that Madonna's eyes, Florence? and that," she exclaimed with clasped hands, "I suppose is the Vandyck that with good reason you gave such a sum for last year; I must look at it to-morrow, and the next day, and the next."

Isabel had at last made the circuit of the room in her tour of curiosity, and stopped at length quite breathless at a window, which looked out upon the extensive green lawn, which it was Vernon's pride ever to have in excellent order, and no one could fail to be delighted with its velvet smoothness, as it stretched in gradual slope to

the woods beyond. Here Isabel paused for a moment, but her silence was not of long continuance, being broken once more with an exclamation of delight.

"Pictures within and pictures without," she exclaimed: "Ah, what a vision of loveliness! Who is that exquisite creature approaching the house, Richard? Her hair is of that pale golden color, so beautiful and so rare, her eyes the most heavenly blue, her cheek just flushed enough for refinement, and her complexion that creamy healthy white which the painters love so much."

"I know not," said Vernon, amused in spite of himself with Isabel's interest in all around her, "unless you have made a vow to see only what is beautiful in the world, and color everything from within, or perhaps you have improvised some maid of honor to attend you as lovely as yourself; or stay, will you have one more suggestion, it may be that a naiad, fresh from her sylvan toilet, has come to ask your orders."

"You do but jest, Mr. Vernon," said Florence, "while Isabel is in earnest, and this apparition is as lovely as she has described—there, stand back a little, Isabel, and let her still be unconscious that we are here; see what a pretty pantomime she is acting as she approaches; now she weaves her flowers into a garland, and like a ballet dancer has thrown them over her head with a graceful movement; now she twines them into a wreath, and apes the graces of a crowned queen, and, ah—see again, how naturally she arranges them into an artistic bouquet, and offers them with a coquettish air to some imaginary swain."


"All that she does seems well done," whispered

Isabel in return; "and, oh, what beauty, what perfect beauty is hers! For the first time in my life you must forgive me for raving about perfections which are not yours, Florence. Hush, she is seating herself at the foot of that huge leafy tree; let us listen, our naiad is beginning to sing."

The truth was gradually dawning upon Vernon, and it came upon him with a glare almost too dazzling, as that beloved voice rose upon his ear. His strong frame trembled, he grew pale, then flushed. Every emotion of the human heart seemed to gather in his breast. Sybil, beautiful! she was his, his own. Sybil, beautiful! ah, fatal gift, the fairest flowers were plucked the soonest, and he would lose this flower he prized so much. Love, jealousy, anger, fear, tenderness, all were felt by him in their full intensity, but gradually as that perfect voice, singing the impassioned Italian music which he had taught it, came wafted in at the window together with the perfume of the flowers, every emotion was calmed save love, complete undying love, a part of him then, and for ever, and as the last note died away in the hush that followed, he found voice to say softly,

"It is my little Sybil Gray."

Then the curtains of an opposite window parted, making a frame for the strangely beautiful face that looked in, and which blushed scarlet at finding strangers there, and at feeling that they had heard her unbidden song; but Vernon, who had heard her light footstep, re-assured her by the kind tone of his voice, and she entered, offering her hand gracefully, but timidly, to the new-comers. A regular introduction, all intuitively felt, would have been awkward and out of place.



Sybil herself felt it, and broke the ice by offering her flowers.

"How beautiful," said Isabel, glancing more at the fair girl who proffered them, than at the flowers themselves.

"Yes," she answered, "they are, indeed. I tried to gather the prettiest I could find to arrange in your rooms before you came, and as is the fashion in some countries, to crown your pillows with a cluster of sweet roses, but I fear that I lingered too long on the way."

"You are very kind," returned Isabel, "you must, however, not lay the defeat of your plans at your own door, but upon our horses, who were fresher than we imagined, and so we came the last few miles more rapidly, arriving here an hour before the specified time."

"I hope, Sybil," said Vernon, "that in your zeal for others you have not forgotten your daily tribute to me."

"*That* I never forget," she answered gravely, "it would be ungrateful indeed; here they are, your own favorites, and a cluster of more beautiful violets I have never seen."

"How wonderful," said Isabel quickly, "the violet is your favorite, too, is it not, Florence?"

Sybil was just extending her hand to place them in Vernon's, when both started, and the fragrant cluster fell to the ground.

*He* remembered that it was her favorite flower, and she—she was startled at the name spoken by Isabel.

Florence! it seemed familiar, it seemed linked with a host of cruel memories, a broken trust, desertion, pain inflicted by one whom Vernon had loved. Then the memories took a more definite form, and Vernon's past

rose clearly before her, and lifting her glance to the face of that stately beauty before her, whose cold searching eyes looked her through and through, her heart told her that there she stood, the destroyer of his happiness, the original of the glorious picture upon whose reverse might have been written the word deceit.

As Sybil stooped to raise the fallen flowers, she mechanically looked up once more; still that piercing glance was upon her, those hawk-like eyes watching the crouching dove, but she turned away from their strange spell, and again offered the flowers to Vernon.

"Take them away, Sybil," he said in a low tone of voice, "I had forgotten that *she* cared for them, take them far away."

Sybil left the room in obedience to that whisper, the guests thought for some domestic order from Vernon, but in reality to be alone. She knew not why, but her heart seemed bursting with some strange new feeling, which she could not analyze. Florence Percy here, she thought, under this very roof! Florence loving the same flowers that Vernon loved! And then how superb she was in her majestic beauty. Isabel was lovely, winning, fascinating, but Florence was regal. Besides, what right had she to look so tenderly upon Vernon, so curiously upon herself? How imposing she was, how rich the dress that enveloped her magnificent form; how visibly a certain sort of power seemed to hang about her, a kind of "*I dare and I will*," which awed and frightened. Dared and willed *what*? A stronger emotion swept over Sybil's heart than she had ever before experienced, an emotion, which she thought, if continued for many days, might kill her. There was no

good angel near to tell her that it was the fiend of jealousy, and its fearful fire burnt strong and clear. She sought a retired part of the garden near the artificial lake, which flowed as clear as crystal at her feet, and a thought something akin to revenge came to her, and she looked around with a guilty glance before it gave birth to a deed, to see that she was unobserved.

"He *shall* not love what she loves," she said passionately, and with an impulsiveness new to her gentle nature, she tore the flowers one by one apart, and threw them into the stream.

But even as the breeze wafted them away, her mood changed, the reaction, which could not be delayed long, came to her in a flow of bitter tears, and holding up the picture of herself to herself, she prayed for pardon, prayed that the hour might pass quickly away, pleaded for strength against temptation, and for more effectual piety, despising herself for her weakness, and most sorrowful for her forgetfulness of her duty; then fearing that her absence would be marked, entered the house once more, apparently as calm as the stream upon which the rejected flowers were floating.

Afterwards when she beheld Florence seeking Vernon's society, and offering him the aid which he was too polite to refuse, and which Sybil felt her right, she examined her heart carefully, probing as she thought, its most secret depths, and came to the following conclusion :

"He has been to me as a brother; I have led him in his blindness, I have read to him, talked to him, sung to him; we two have been alone in joy and sorrow, and now another comes and takes my place; it is natural,

then, that I should feel my rights infringed upon ; but she is not to blame, she knows not what I have been to him, how I have watched him in sickness and health ; no, *she is not to blame*—and to him there may be a fascination in being once more in the presence of one who has been so dearly loved as she has been, he may like to hear the tones of her voice, and feel the pressure of her hand ; it may bring back to him the happy hours of his youth, when it was almost his religion to worship at her shrine ; but, oh, how could she, how could she after all that has passed, after she has scorned him and been scorned alike in return, come into his presence, to his very hearthstone again ?”

After Florence had, as she thought, defined Sybil's position in the household, that is, after she had come to the conclusion that Vernon simply regarded her as an interesting child, whom he had trained according to his ideas, to womanhood ; after she had considered the wide difference in their ages, which seemed to forbid anything like the perfect sympathy which she thought she herself could feel for him, and he for her ; and when she saw that the retiring girl in no way interfered with her own plans, she, as well as Isabel, looked with wonder upon her singular loveliness and varied gifts, and assumed a patronizing air to Vernon's young charge. But though Isabel was most fascinating, and Florence kindness itself, Sybil did not feel quite at ease with them, and spent even more of her time than formerly with her grandmother, or in the quiet of her own apartment, while Vernon, who kept his secret so well, longed for the visit to be at an end.

He was weary of the rustle of silks and satins, the, to

him, unmeaning city gossip, and for the jewels and gew-gaws which they discussed with an interest worthy of a better theme, he cared not. Those busy fashionists seemed to him too much like a mirror of his former self, and while rejoicing that he had outlived their tastes, he sighed for a return of his quiet evenings with Sybil. After a moment's reflection, Florence's course of conduct and singular intrusion ceased to astonish him, as he recalled what she had done in the past, but he shrank from the daily contact of her proffered hand, and avoided her whenever he could do so without marked rudeness.

It was with difficulty, however, that he could suppress his old irritation of manner, as he seldom had an opportunity of being alone with her who, by a word, could calm him; for in all his walks and drives, his morning and evening pursuits, Florence and Isabel were his constant companions.

"Here we have entered upon the Sabbath," said Isabel one bright morning in a languid tone, "is there no church in the neighborhood, Richard, to which we can go? Of all things, what most wearies me is a Sunday in the country; the world is even more still here than it is in town, and nature seems to put her finger on her lip and whisper, 'hush.' Even a sermon from a poor drawling minister would serve to relieve the monotony of the day."

Vernon believed that there was a church somewhere. "But do you never go?" asked Isabel, "you did so when you lived in the city, and therefore have gone backward instead of forward as regards the culture of the *soul*, though, indeed, Richard, your *fields* there are patterns for agriculturists."



"With somewhat of your dread of drawling ministers, Isabel," returned her brother, "I confess that I have never gone, but Sybil can give you all needed information, for though the church is several miles distant, my ponderous family coach is ordered through rain and sunshine, and she makes a weekly pilgrimage in it there."

"But you will go with us to-day, since we desire it?" pleaded Isabel; though we *are* distinguished strangers, lions, we need some one to show us off. It will be so awkward to sail up the aisle unattended by an escort. I am sure that Florence will guide you carefully if we go."

"No, I cannot, will not," said Vernon decidedly, "if I have one aversion above another, it is to hear a canting mediocre preacher, and I suppose that they have one of the worst kind here."

"You are mistaken," replied Sybil, quickly, and with more warmth than was usual in her manner, "he is eloquent sometimes, and always solemn, and being young and ambitious, he is in a fair way to improve; besides, he told me one day after service, when we were speaking about a sermon which he had just preached, and which came home especially to my heart, that it was his aim and endeavor to excel, and he thought that much more good could be achieved by an intelligent pastor who kept up with the age, than by a man who trod for ever the beaten ground of conservatism and hackneyed custom. His theme had been upon the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which he treated in a new and powerful manner, at least," she added flushing at the notice that she had drawn upon herself, "as far as I can judge from my small experience and the sermons I have read in books."

Isabel and Florence exchanged significant glances.

"Your defence of the *young man*," said the latter pointedly, "is most eloquent, Sybil, and you appear to be very good friends."

"Yes, very," she replied quietly, quite unconscious of the weight put upon what she had said.

The words struck a harsh chord in Vernon's breast. He had often heard her mention the preacher whom she had listened to weekly, and sometimes as an exercise she gave him a synopsis of his sermons, but instead of being a young and attractive man, he had always fancied him a grey-haired individual, with a monotonous drawl and a puritanical air, but this revelation of Sybil's inspired him with a sudden fancy to hear him preach and to judge for himself.

"I think that I will go to church to-day," he said suddenly. "I have a great desire to know if Sybil has not exaggerated the wonderful talents of her spiritual guide;" and he rang and ordered the carriage.

"I did not say that his talents were wonderful," returned Sybil gravely, "and I think that no one should go to church from curiosity, even to hear a celebrated preacher, for the most inferior preachers can impart to us some good if we choose to receive it. There may be something about a man's circumstances and character which impresses us favorably, and this is singularly the case with Mr. Clarke. He has been the support of an aged mother for years, and his sister likewise has been dependent on him. His support was very scanty until he came here, but now his salary is not only sufficient to maintain himself and them, but not long ago he went to the city to be married, and was expected to return last

week with his bride, to whom he has been attached a long time, a beautiful girl, they say, who leaves the luxuries of her father's house to share with him his humble home."

Vernon breathed freely again. He had now no fear that the shepherd would steal his little lamb to nestle her in his own bosom, and his desire to go to church suddenly abated, while Isabel and Florence went to prepare their elaborate toilets, and he and Sybil for the first time for many days were left alone.

"How delightful it is to think that you are going to church, Mr. Vernon," said Sybil joyfully, "it will be so pleasant to have you with us."

"And why, Sybil?—your paragon of a preacher will discourse no more eloquently for my presence. I have just altered my mind, and am determined not to go."

Sybil's countenance fell.

"And will you not reconsider it and change again?" she said sadly, "one can afford to be fickle where a good cause is concerned."

"Wherefore should I change?" said Vernon seating himself more comfortably in the luxurious arm-chair into which he had thrown himself. "It seems to me that any change from this most easy posture would be for the worse."

"Think how objectless your Sabbath life is," she said, taking a chair near him. "I have long desired to converse with you upon this subject, but have never had the courage to broach it; but now, to-day, the *sister-spirit* is strong within me, and I must speak. Dear Mr. Vernon, those words, 'Remember the Sabbath,' were meant to be observed, and not passed over lightly; and how can we better recall them than in a house dedicated to the

worship of Him who commanded the observance of a day set apart?"

"I can carry on my religious services at home, Sybil; nay, I would be willing to compare my thoughts with those of certain church-worshippers to-day after the service, very much, I think, to the advantage of mine."

"I doubt it not," said Sybil, still more earnestly, because pained by Richard's manner, "but think of the example you set. Suppose that all remained at home as you do, what would be the use of the solemn bells calling us to worship? All the charm and vitality of the Sabbath would be gone. Only go to-day—just to-day, Mr. Vernon, and I trust that what you hear and feel will take you there again."

Vernon silently mused awhile. He had not been an inattentive listener to her pleading words spoken so truly and in so good a cause,—and at length he replied to her.

"You are a sweet preacher, and a most persuasive one," he said, "and to answer your appeal candidly, I must tell you that awhile ago when I ordered the carriage, I had determined to go for a far different motive than any reason that you have given; but now I verily believe that you have convinced me that it is my duty, and moreover, because you would like to have me accompany you I will go—but with one proviso, that you will promise to lead me in. I trust that I have not so far forgotten my early training as to enter a house dedicated to God with unholy thoughts, and only with your pure, devout spirit near me could I feel as I ought. If that hand all covered with jewels which has led me lately should guide me, I think that I should rebel,—and I want to feel humble to-day, Sybil."

How good and gentle he seemed to her to be growing ; how that one wish for humility raised him in her eyes.

No louder sound of triumph rang from the silvery tongue of the humble church, no higher pointed the tapering spire up to the blue heavens, no greener waved the churchyard trees as the quartette from Vernon Grove alighted at the lowly portal ; the only change that could be noticed was in the eyes of the simple villagers under Mr. Clarke's care, as the unusual rustling of silken garments attracted their attention, and for a moment made them forgetful of their prayers ; but could the hearts of the new-comers have been examined as faithfully, they would have had fresh cause for wonder.

First came Vernon leaning upon the arm of the beautiful girl, whom they have been accustomed to see treading the aisle with downcast eyes alone ; then Isabel, arrayed in all the mysteries of fashionable attire ; and lastly Florence, with a cloud upon her fair brow, all unfit for that holy place.

And their hearts ?

Vernon was conscious of being in a strange situation —glad, yet confused ; satisfied, inasmuch as he thought that he had done his duty, yet awkward and nervous because it was all so new, not having entered among anything like an assemblage of persons since the visitation of his blindness, and knowing that many eyes were curiously watching him. Isabel was looking with a mixture of amusement and pity upon those “unfortunate people,” as she called them in a whisper to Florence, whose bonnets were so many years behind the fashion, and whose scant dresses excited her sympathy as she swept imperially by,—while Florence, alike indifferent

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to place and people, only felt a bitter pang in her breast that her proffered hand had been rejected by Vernon, and his words, "I thank you, but Sybil will lead me to-day," continued to sound in her ears far above the peal of the Sabbath bells.

Even our pure Sybil's heart beat with a feeling that was not all religion; a joy scarcely dedicated to God shone in her eyes, for Vernon was with her, and it was a triumph,—Vernon would soon be praying for peace and pardon at her side.

The minister, under the influence of his new found joy, preached solemnly and feelingly; his life was so full now of earthly happiness with his mother and sister well provided for at last, looking with pride upon their young son and brother, and his bride with downcast eyes listening to his words and rejoicing that she had chosen so well, that he felt the need of some solemn self-admonition as a counterpoise to his intense happiness, lest he should forget in his temporal felicity the heaven for which he was striving. It was, then, with a deep sense of his need of a reminder to keep him humble, that he chose for his text, the words *Keep thy heart with all diligence*, as especially required by him at this time, not involving that part of his nature which was perishable, but the spiritual heart and affections which belonged exclusively to a higher state of being.

Life is full of contradictions, and Vernon, who a few short hours before had scoffingly spoken of religion as a thing to be put on and off at pleasure, now acknowledged to himself that it was the only one thing needful in life, and as the words of the young minister seemed to him directly addressed to him, laying bare his secret sins to his view,

wounding sometimes but oftener healing with their gentleness and pity, he felt a glad joy within him that he had come with Sybil—a new light dawned upon him, a new hope that even *he* might win the pardon which was so freely offered ; and as they departed with the lingering tone of the solemn benediction in their ears, he whispered to his companion as he pressed her arm, “Thank you, Sybil, for this day’s experience.”

“Thank God, rather,” she said softly.

“And will you guide me here again, even one so unworthy as I?”

“The wish proves you not unworthy,” she said.

“And can I come with you always?”

“*Always*,” whispered Sybil joyfully.

Then they issued from the porch out beneath the brilliant concave of the radiant heavens, and the sun lit up Isabel’s jewels with more dazzling light, and the gold-tipped plume of Florence waved glancing in its rays, but to the angel at the portal there was a brighter glory all unseen by mortal eye around the blind man and his gentle guide.

### CHAPTER XIII.

"The glittering dome, the arch, the towering column,  
Are sights that greet us now on every hand,  
And all so wild, so strange, so sweetly solemn—  
So like one's fancies formed of fairy land!  
And these then are your works, mysterious powers!  
Your spells are o'er, around us, and beneath,  
These opening aisles, these crystal fruits and flowers,  
And glittering grots, and high-arched beauteous bowers  
As still as death!"

POEMS BY AMELIA.

It cannot be wondered at that the fair ladies from the city soon grew weary of their monotonous country life. To be sure Isabel confessed that the roses had deepened on her cheeks, and that Florence's complexion, owing to early hours, had a peculiar richness about it which it never displayed in the crowded saloons of fashion; but a month seemed to stretch out interminably before them, and Vernon was at a loss to find entertainment for his guests.

In him they were evidently disappointed; not that he lacked any of the attentions due from a host, but a certain reserve towards Florence, who tried in vain to dissipate it, threw a deep shadow over the whole party. No word had been spoken about their former position, except that chance illusion of Isabel's to other happy times. No one would ever have imagined that a tie as



strong as an engagement had existed between Vernon and Florence, and there appeared to be a tacit understanding that they were to act as if their footing had only been a friendly one; but behind this policy on the part of the two friends, there was a bold design which they hoped in time to put into execution, while Vernon, on his side, merely cared to be on terms of politeness with the woman who had once been so near and dear to him, and not to reveal to her one secret emotion of his heart. His aim was to be indifferent; he wished not even to let her see the whole extent of his scorn, and dreaded still more to lift to her curious gaze the curtain which shut out from her knowledge his deep love for Sybil, but in this latter calculation he *over-calculated* his self-possession, for an event occurred which matured the plans of Florence, and showed her how Sybil was not only his household angel, but that she guarded every avenue of the heart which she had once called her own.

Reader, have you ever visited one of those curiosities of the world of wonders, a natural cave? If you have, your reminiscences will be revived by the experiences of the inmates of Vernon Grove; if you have not, you must enter with them for the first time on a dark and mysterious scene.

Several miles from Vernon's residence there was one of those freaks of nature long famed for its extent and peculiarities, to which many a long and weary pilgrimage had been made by curious travellers from all climes and countries. Vernon, remembering what he had heard of its famed statuary, its Solomon's Temple, its Pantheon, bethought him that a visit there might please

Sybil, and serve to vary somewhat the visit of his sister and her friend, who, though too well bred openly to confess their *ennui*, showed it consciously by many a word and act. Vernon congratulated himself upon the happy thought, and a party was formed, consisting of the guests from the city, Vernon and Sybil, the young minister and his wife, together with John, who, besides being indispensable to Vernon, was to act as *valet-general* to the whole company.

After a long but not tedious drive to their place of destination, for their spirits were high in contemplation of the experiences which awaited them, they engaged the services of a guide, and at once proceeded to explore the cave.

Each one was provided with a lantern, and the first step seemed that which was most to be dreaded, as the aperture was too small to admit them standing upright, and the darkness, in contrast with the light of day which they were leaving behind them, quite appalling. Isabel and Florence at first shrank from the undertaking as something impossible to be achieved, but their curiosity prevailed over their fears,—and, moreover, reflecting that they would be looked upon as heroines on their return to the city when they described the wonders of their visit to the cave, they entered, trembling at first, with the rest, but soon lost all sense of terror in enjoyment, for no account which they had ever received of the wonders there was equal to the strange, weird, mysterious scene before them.

In the first chamber they entered, their guide assembling the party all around him, warned them of the perils which surrounded them,—the more dangerous

often for being unseen. Sometimes, he told them, they would walk on the brink of a towering precipice on the margin of a river, flowing so noiselessly as to be unheard. Then he informed them that but few comparatively of the chambers in that wilderness of apartments had been explored, and that hundreds of passages were all around into which not even he had ever ventured; and then, in order to enforce upon them the necessity of their keeping together, and above all, keeping him in view, he related to them the sad story of a guide, who, like himself, had been in the habit of taking parties through the cave, but one day being alone, and having before expressed a determination to explore some untrodden ground, had never been seen again, being in all probability lost in some of those myriad chambers, or drowned in a silent and undiscovered stream. Then passing on to a still more fearful story, he informed the breathless listeners of the sad fate of a party of students, who, rejecting his aid, and being determined to penetrate into the mysteries of the cavern themselves, had disappeared never to return. At the end of the period when he thought that they would require food and rest, and feeling somewhat alarmed regarding their protracted absence, he had gone in search of them,—and after much laborious investigation, had discovered only their dead bodies in a part of the cave which had never been explored before.

“These things I tell you,” he continued, “not to frighten or discourage you,” as he looked around upon our party, and saw by the light of the lanterns that their faces were blanched with fear, “but merely to warn you, repeating that there is no peril whatever if you keep me in sight and attend closely to my direc-

tions; and I promise you, on these conditions, only pleasure, and something new under the sun to talk about when you return to your homes."

Thus re-assured, the party entered cheerfully upon their strange pilgrimage.

"Do I lose a great deal, Sybil?" were Vernon's first words when they emerged from the contracted passage through which they had passed, and stood upright in a fine chamber filled with figures that seemed by the lamp light to resemble groups of statuary.

"That you do not see, is God's will," she said softly, while a feeling of awe crept over her at the magnitude and beauty of the scene before her. "You *do* lose a great deal, and it is beyond description wonderful; all around us stand upright stalagmites in forms as varied as the carvings and devices of art, and so correct is the deception, that one could almost fancy different expressions upon the carved faces of the figures. For instance, not far from us is a Hebe, pouring out wine from a glittering goblet, and yonder is a Neptune, with hoary beard hanging down to his waist; and now the guide beckons us onward, and we are entering another chamber, at the end of which is a throne, just as one might conceive a real throne looks, all spangling with jewels and crowned with a grand imposing seat, fit for a king."

Vernon listened to his companion with a mixture of pain and delight—it was so tantalizing not to behold what she did, and sympathise with her; so sweet to feel that he was the special object of her care, and leaning upon her arm to listen to her unstudied words, which came with glad accents from her lips, and to think that


even though powerless himself, Sybil moved nearer to his side, as though for protection, when the scenes through which they passed assumed a gloomy or forbidding character.

"Now," she continued, in a lower tone, made audible to Vernon alone, so that her voice might not interrupt the descriptions or explanations of the guide, "we are entering upon a scene of great beauty. This chamber seems to be ceiled with shells, all starry and brilliant with glistening stalactites; the very heavens seem to be overhead, and one feels as though he were in the open air when looking upward. Did I not *know* to the contrary, I should think that I saw my favorite constellations shining there, and I am sure that I can trace those three gorgeous stars in Orion's belt; after all it *must* be the natural heavens seen through a gap in the walls of this mystic cave."

"No," replied Vernon, "in that you are mistaken, for I have often heard of this celebrated chamber and the perfect deception of its star-paved ceiling."

A call from the guide now made them quicken their lingering footsteps.

"Tread securely here," continued Sybil, as she guided her companion carefully, "we are entering a passage from which we shall have to ascend several steps; and now that we have left them, I think that we seem to be emerging upon a remarkable scene. Oh! that you could see for yourself its marked peculiarities. Yonder in the distance is a castle in ruins, huge pillars lie clustered together, and broken arches appear, which one could almost fancy to be crumbling to dust, so perfect is the illusion. We might, without a great stretch of the imagi-



nation, fancy ourselves walking amid some celebrated ruin of the old world. I would like to know if Mr. Linwood, with his varied experiences, has ever visited a cave like this. Scenes far more grand I know that he has beheld, but scarcely could this be equalled in the peculiarity of its style."

"I think not," replied Vernon; "I think that Linwood has never been here or he would have mentioned it to me; the catacombs of Rome awe one with the same mysterious sensations, but then the associations and whole aspect there are so different that I doubt whether they should in any particular be compared. When Linwood returns we must pay another visit here on his especial account. Some people are so conscientious about having seen the wonders of this new world, as to refuse to travel abroad until they have been visited, and indeed there is often an awkwardness about confessing ignorance concerning scenes which are comparatively so near to us,—for almost the first question one hears who goes sight-seeing abroad is, 'Well, I suppose that you behold nothing here that surpasses your far-famed Niagara,'—taking it for granted that all Americans have seen it, and that it lies at our very doors."

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by an exclamation from Isabel, which betokened a sudden sense of delight, as they entered a large apartment which the guide called the Ball Room. Enormous stalactites hung pendant from the ceiling in the shape of chandeliers, while a gallery at the head of the room, supported by symmetrical pillars, seemed a fitting station for an orchestra. The simple light of the lanterns of the visitors was not enough to illuminate this large hall, the

guide therefore lit a multitude of candles, and as he placed them in different points, the effect was curiously perfect. Festoons of garlands seemed to droop from the pillars, and candelabra to start from the walls.

"We only want music now," exclaimed Isabel to Florence, "and a few choice spirits, to enjoy a dance; how charming it would be!"

But Florence was in no mood to enjoy; she could not feel at ease while Vernon so exclusively appropriated Sybil to himself, and she was tantalized too, by the low tone in which they conversed, apparently upon subjects of interest, and only waited for a fitting opportunity to place herself in Sybil's stead at his side.

After passing through the Ball-Room, the party proceeded down a wide flight of steps, on through a narrow passage, and from thence to a room called the Steeple Room, from its containing a perfectly formed steeple constructed of stalagmites rising to a considerable height from the ground; and then on, to perhaps the most beautiful scene in the whole cave, a stalagmite mass of white incrustations, which had the appearance of a grand fall suddenly arrested in its downward course. The timid bride, on beholding it, started back and clung closer to her husband's arm as she approached it, for its overhanging masses were so like a sheet of water that it seemed as if it would momentarily inundate the whole chamber.

In the next apartment, which was named the Ghost Room, from the peculiar appearance the light cast upon the walls, which were cragged and irregular, the guide, taking away all the lanterns of the party, told them to remain quietly in their places until he returned; at least

by no means to move to any distance on account of the dangers of which he had warned them before, and leaving them all in darkness, he withdrew into an adjoining chamber.

It was certainly the blackness of darkness in which they now found themselves; not a ray of light penetrated the vaulted roof, and a sense of loneliness and terror pervaded each heart.

The guide did not remain away many minutes, but during that time an incident occurred which lent a deeper gloom to the spirits of one of the party than even that which reigned about her; and could Florence have believed in earthly suffering as a retribution for the pains she had inflicted on others, she must have thought herself amply repaid then and there. She was standing near Vernon on one side, while upon the other was Sybil, ever faithful to her trust, whose arm was twined within his own.

A few words were uttered by Isabel, a few jesting careless words, followed by her own silvery laugh, but no one joined it, the darkness seemed too solemn a thing to jest about—an incubus, a heavy hand, laid upon each, commanding a serious mood, and as the last echo of that ill-timed mirth died away, Florence bent forward to catch the whispered tones of Sybil, who was speaking to her companion.

“It was a thing *to feel*,” she said, “this terrible gloom, darker than night, dark as fabled Erebus; to see it, to see this blackness is nothing, but to feel it, oh, it is terrible!”

“There is no difference to me, dear Sybil,” was the low answer heard by Florence, as well as by her to whom



it was addressed, "it is all alike night, chaotic night; but I am not sorry to have brought you here, for you can know in this intense gloom which you have described, better how to feel for me."

"It did not require this experience," she returned, "to call forth my entire sympathy; you had that from the first moment that I saw you, when, as a child, I gave you my garland of flowers, but I confess that now I realize what I never did before, the almost agony of your eternal night, no beauty, no sky and stars, no glad, cheering, cheerful light."

"Yes, there is one ray," he answered tenderly, "bright as the torch of an angel, a gift from God's own treasury of light, a ray as fresh and pure as that which first broke the primeval gloom."

"I thought that it was all darkness," said Sybil, with a glad tremor in her tone; "then there may be hope that one day in the future, science and skill combined may give you sight again."

"You mistake my meaning, sweet enthusiast," he answered, "that can never, never be. It was, as you say, all darkness," he continued, turning his face towards her until she felt his breath stirring the soft circlets of her hair, "until one day when *you* came, Sybil, and that blessed ray of light is simply what you brought with you. I would rather be blind *with it*, than in the full possession of my sight *without it*, God himself knows that I would, Sybil."

Where were Richard Vernon's resolves? What was there in his words and his breath upon Sybil's brow, what charm unfelt before, that brought that deep bright blush, though all unseen to her face? Why did her

hand tremble as it lay confidingly upon his arm; why the quicker beating of that neighboring heart of hers? Did he not promise to guard his very tones, and yet his lips were framing themselves to utter tender words, which following upon that oath made so solemnly to himself to regard her outwardly ever as a sister, would have made him guilty of perjury. He was saved, however, from that sin by an interruption unforeseen, unexpected.

Another had heard those strong passionate words, another who stood near, and it brought to her memory his love-tones of the past; her soul burned with jealousy and the madness of a disappointed hope. If ever, *now* was the time, she thought, to win him back to her sway, and to free him from those invisible charms which Sybil all unconsciously was throwing around him, and while he waited for a word, a single word, or movement, or sigh from Sybil in answer, he felt his hand, which was near Florence, caught and held firmly by another cold, untrembling hand, which he knew too well, and whispered words of tenderness sounded close to his ear.

"Richard, Richard," said the voice brokenly, "forgive and forget the past. I can explain it all. She does not understand you; she, that child, could never fathom the depths of your soul as I have done, as I could do again. I was weak, was wicked to wander from you as I did; forgive me and I will prove that I was false to you only in appearance, not in truth! They never loved who say that they loved *once*, and oh, Richard, I have never ceased loving you. Leave *her*, give her to some one more congenial in years, in feelings, in experience; she is no mate for a world-tried, a world-worn man; return

to one who has always loved you, and calls heaven to witness her sincerity."

Sybil did not hear her, and if she had, not well could she have connected those half-murmured, half-whispered ejaculations, wrung from a maddened heart, which had staked its happiness or misery upon that moment, nor did she see that he had dashed that intruding hand away from him with disgust, although she knew that he shuddered as though suffering some bodily pain, and his answering words, emphatically spoken as he bent towards Florence, reached her ear alone for whom they were intended and dropped like melted lead upon her quivering heart.

"Florence Percy, the time has passed for such words as you have just uttered; they are meaningless to my ears. Listen and judge for yourself—what we might have been is a dream, what we are a reality; believe me when I say to you that I feel each day more and more this truth—the affection, which I thought I had for you once, was merely a passing fancy, unworthy even the name of love. Stand aside, there is no ground upon which you and I can meet; stand aside."

He had almost cursed her, and yet in his heart of hearts he blessed her for one thing; she had reminded him of his duty. Thank God, he thought, those burning words to Sybil had remained unspoken; thank God, she was standing calmly by him still all unconscious of his struggle, all unconscious of the bitter words, "she is no mate for a world-worn, world-tried man," which had brought him back to reason and the memory of his vow.

The guide returned with the light and found a lady

faint, but it was a common occurrence, he said, in that fearful darkness, where the coming lanterns made such unearthly light on the walls of the Ghost Chamber, and taking a cup of water from a neighboring spring, he presented it to Florence, whose dry quivering lips it moistened and refreshed.

From this point, the Ghost Room, our party retraced their steps, and examined with new delight the varied beauties of the cave, finding many which they had before passed unnoticed. In one of the chambers, Sybil became quite interested in noting the formation of some pieces of rock crystal which she saw of singular beauty, and desiring a specimen, she left Vernon's arm for a moment, giving him in charge of John, in order to examine it more attentively, and to try to break off a tempting cluster which met her view. Bending down apart from the others, whose attention was attracted by something else, and absorbed in looking at the glittering crystal as it seemed momentarily to take new forms of beauty, she did not hear the call from the guide, nor see that her companions had left the chamber in which she was, and had turned an abrupt angle, and proceeding quickly through an apartment which had nothing curious about it to attract their attention, had passed on still farther to one of more spacious proportions and extraordinary beauty.

Here the guide, as was his custom, began to call the attention of the visitors to the curiosities around, when he suddenly paused, and with a troubled expression on his face, counted the party as he had often done during the day, to see that none were missing; then in a tone which thrilled like a death-knell upon his listeners, he

said words which they never forgot. They were these.

*One of our party is not here !*

Then came back to them his remembered words of warning, his terrible stories of death by starvation or drowning, and the question, *Who is it ?* rang like a clarion from every lip, and when each inquired for those who were dearest and missed them not, and Vernon for her who was his nearest and dearest, and heard no answering voice, his anguish escaped from him in one mad fearful cry, that rang through the vaulted rooms like the voice of one calling the beloved dead back again to life. It was a cry of agony seldom heard by mortal ear, that one piercing, echoing, and re-echoing word, "Sybil."

But no answer came.

Then all felt and knew that it was she ; the guide, that it was the fair-haired girl, whose face and floating form seemed to him like an angel's ; the bride and her young husband, that it was she whose voice rose on each Sabbath into praise and prayer, and from whose gentle eyes beamed the holy joy of some saint-like Madonna ; Isabel, that it was the child-woman who had presided so gracefully in her brother's house, and who had tried in every way to make their visit to the Grove a happy one, and who had read and talked to them, or sang tune after tune to their craving ears, wearied never, so that they were entertained ; and Florence, that it was that Sybil Gray, who had dared to step in between her and her ambition, and had plucked the only flower in her path ; and Vernon, that it was she who was his *very life*.

"Sybil, Sybil !" that mad despairing cry, louder and louder now upon every lip, gave to Vernon a still more

realizing sense of her danger, and he was about to go himself in pursuit of the lost one, when the guide, in a voice of authority, besought him and all, on the peril of their lives, to remain where they were. It would avail nothing, he said, for the whole party to go in search of her, even in company with him, for they necessarily would retard his progress, and departing alone in different directions would be madness, for to all who attempted it would come the same fate as that of the unfortunate students whom he had before mentioned. For his part, he concluded, in his little address as they stood anxiously around him, he supposed that she was waiting patiently for them in the Lime Crystal Chamber, where they had last seen her, and he thought it the best and most practical plan for all to accompany him there, where no doubt they would find her smiling at their alarm; but if that room were deserted and no traces could be discovered of her, he would take the servant John, and at once proceed to a systematic search, while the party remained awaiting his return.

This advice was so plausible, and any other course of conduct seemed so wild and impracticable, that all acquiesced in his views, and Vernon, pale and anxious beyond all the others, could not but express his satisfaction in what he had proposed.

At every two or three steps, the guide, as he led the party back, sounded the peculiar *hallo!* which is heard furthest in that dreary cavern, and the name of the missing one was shouted from time to time by the different members of the party; but alas, the only answer was a dreary silence, or a still more dreary echo, until at last they reached the Lime Crystal Chamber.

*But Sybil was not there !*

Then the guide, more anxious than he dared acknowledge, hurriedly bade them be of good cheer, and taking John with him, disappeared through one of the dark entrances, though perplexed to know which one of the many that led out of the apartment she could have taken.

Even Isabel's gay mood was softened, and with a transition common to such natures as hers, felt from one extreme to another, and burst into a passion of tears. The young minister and his wife, clinging more closely together, as though fearful that some fate might come to tear them apart from each other, retired to a distant part of the room, and their religious natures found vent in an earnest prayer for Sybil's welfare.

Florence alone seemed calm and self-possessed ; yes, she who awhile ago stood with colorless face and faint limbs in the dark chamber, now appeared mistress of a wonderful self-command ; her cold searching eye looking around upon the excited group with a heartless curiosity. But upon Vernon she gazed most frequently, as he sat with his head bowed upon his knees in mute despair, lifting his pale face at intervals if the slightest noise reached his ears, or clenching his hands as if his blindness were a curse and the guide a cruel jailor to keep him passive there, while Florence, from these mingled emotions, read with a smile of triumphant scorn upon her beautiful face, only the tale of a love that would give its life for the beloved one,—*and she read aright.*

## CHAPTER XIV.

"Hark! hear ye not those echoes ringing after,  
Our gliding step—my spirit faints with fear,—  
Those mocking tones, like subterranean laughter—  
Or does the brain grow wild with wondering here!  
There may be spectres wild and forms appalling  
Our wandering eyes, where'er we rove, to greet—  
Methinks I hear their low sad voices calling  
Upon us now, and far away the falling  
Of phantom feet."

POEMS BY AMELIA.

"A new life, like a young sunrise, breaks  
On the strange unrest of the night." BROWNING.


WHEN Sybil turned from her examination of the crystals she found that the party had gone, but feeling no difficulty about following them, turned into the nearest chamber which she observed, supposing it to be the only one besides that by which she had entered, and pursued its winding course for some distance. At length, being a little anxious about not having overtaken them, she called several times but with no response, until a thought of terror came to her, blanching her face and causing her limbs to tremble,—*the thought of being lost*, and she quickened her pace, not knowing that each step led her farther from her friends.

At last the truth burst upon her that she was indeed alone and forsaken in that terrible place, so full of unseen



perils. The moment was a fearful one in which she realized her situation; she shouted in agony for help, she called upon Vernon until her voice grew hoarse and only whispered vainly his name; her eyes peered into the darkness until they were blood-shot with the straining; a cold chill crept over her; her voice grew fainter in its hoarse whispers and perfectly unmanageable; her limbs were faint. Pausing awhile to reflect upon her situation, a vision of the poor lost guide, of whom she had heard, came to her memory, and she determined that she would remain stationary, hoping that some one would compassionately follow her to the apartment where she was; it was better to do that, she thought, than to rush on into some unseen peril. Still the remembrance of the lost guide would not depart from her; perhaps even now she might be treading upon his bones, and with that sickening thought she raised her lantern to see if the place were at all familiar to her, and to assure herself that at least no unsightly skeleton kept her company; but moving one step farther on, her foot struck upon some unseen obstacle, throwing her down upon the ground, while her lantern was rudely forced from her hand by the shock; the light flickered more brightly for a moment and then was entirely extinguished, leaving her upon the cold slimy ground in utter darkness. Groping about she raised herself from her prostrate attitude, and leaning against a broken stalagmite formation, gave herself up to retrospection and prayer.

As in the case of a person who is about to be drowned, a panorama of his whole life is presented in an instant of time, so did Sybil Gray conjure up all the past scenes of her life, and all whom in her short career she had ever



known. First she thought of her grandmother, who had been alike father and mother to her, lying at home lonely and ill, with no tender hands of grandchild or relation to arrange her pillows or smooth down her scant grey locks; then of Isabel, so kind and yet so changeable, sometimes treating her as a companion and then as a child or plaything; of Vernon and his helpless blindness, of his devotion to her through the long years of the past—what could he, what would he do without her? Then Florence's superb eyes flashed upon her in the darkness, and she thought of her; would *she* guide and guard him when they had relinquished all hope of finding her, and would he call *her* his ray of light in the darkness, and would they become reconciled and love each other as they once did? Then the perfect happiness of the young bride and bridegroom came to her mind, and she murmured to herself how sweet it must be to love and to be loved, and to have one in the wide world who would be glad to hear every thought as it came unstudied from the mind, and to sit with clasped hands, as they did, feeling sure that they were dear to each other. Then at length her vivid imagination wandered to Europe, that world of wonders, where Albert Linwood painted those beautiful angel-like heads. She wondered what *he* would say when he heard that little Sybil Gray's bones were mouldering in the silence of that fearful cave.

The humblest person, the minutest thing in her eventful life, were all remembered, until at last the memory turned upon herself, and her soul melted in pity for that poor, beating, fluttering heart of hers, and tears chased each other silently down her cheeks, while her hands

clasped her throat, as if to repress the choking sensation which seemed to deprive her of breath.

"They will search for me and will not find me," she sobbed; "I shall grow faint, and hungry, and tired here, and like others, shall wander about and never be heard of more; some treacherous stream will engulf me, or I shall starve, day by day, until I die a horrible death."

Then pity, self pity, turned to madness, and she clasped her delicate hands together wildly, and beat her head against the senseless rock; then extending her hands as if to ward off some demon, which in her madness she had conjured up, thinking that with hungry eyes it approached her, she uttered a despairing shriek and struck them against a hard substance near, when a roll, like the heavy tone of a deep bass drum, a sort of knell, to departing hope, sounded, and sent new terror into her soul. She did not know then that there was a room within the cave called the Drum Room, which was so named from a thin stalactite partition extending from the ceiling to the floor, and which emits, by even a gentle tap, a tone like distant thunder. Had she known this she might have kept her consciousness, and even through her madness have had returning gleams of reason; but the poor girl only read in its sepulchral unearthly tone, a confirmation of her terrible fate, a sort of "Amen" to the shriek with which she filled the cavern, and she rose to fly, anywhere, anywhere, on, on, even if it proved to her certain death, which would be preferable to that cruel, prolonged, suffering life. But she was not equal to the effort; her strength suddenly forsook her, and she fell with a pitiful moan upon the ground, insensible, with

scarcely a sign of life about her save in the faint fluttering of her heart.

At peace at last, because unconscious ! Unconscious of the darkness, the horror, the damp cold rock which pillowed her head ; oblivious to memory, to cheating hope, to life itself. It was a peace like that one sometimes hopes to find in the silent grave when weary of the jar, the tears, the trials, the sorrows of existence. The storm had done its worst ; sail, and mast, and pennon, had been torn away from the graceful bark in the struggle with the elements, till at last it had sunk fathoms deep, out of reach of storm or wind, resting peacefully at length amid the coral shores.

Poor driven bark, poor crazed, helpless, unconscious Sybil ! And it was thus that the kind guide found her, but no effort of his could rouse her from her death-like stupor. He was a powerful man, used to fatigue and exertion of every kind, and though his outward bearing was rough, he had the heart of a woman, and he gazed upon the poor child somewhat as a mother would look upon a helpless infant, blessing her sweet white face, and feeling a joy, in rescuing her, that he had not known in his monotonous life for years. Then he stooped, and lifting her in his arms, carried her tenderly back to her friends, talking to her all the while in comforting words as though she heard and understood him, bidding her to be patient, for she would soon be with them again, asking her if her drooping form lay easily upon his strong muscular arm, and changing her position several times for fear that she might be wearied.

It was well that Vernon's eyes were closed to the touching sight as they entered ; it would have been too sad a spectacle for one who loved her so tenderly.

Long before they entered, the word "Found!" uttered by the guide in a voice which could be heard at some distance, sent a thrill to his heart that he never forgot, and had it not been for the persuasions of the rest of the party, he would have rushed forward to meet her, but they reminded him of the guide's express injunctions and the danger of intricate passages, and he consented at last to wait, though each succeeding moment seemed to swell to an hour's duration.

At length they entered, her slight form borne on the stalwart arm of the guide, while with his free hand he held his lantern aloft so that the light struck immediately upon her pallid face. Her position was so helpless that it was hard to distinguish it from death, for her head was inclined backward and her long fair hair had escaped from its fastening and was trailing on the ground, while her arms fell in that drooping position which the limbs of the lifeless always have before they become stiffened with cold. It was to the bystanders indeed death, though without its ungraceful rigidity.

"Is she dead?" asked Isabel inadvertently, as they entered, and the group gathered round the guide anxious to know every particular from his lips.

"Oh, my God, not dead!" was all that Vernon could say, "she cannot, she must not die;" while he pressed his hands tightly over his blinded eyes as if to invoke sight therefrom, that he might assure himself of her real condition.

"Oh, no, not dead; at least not just yet," said the guide compassionately, and yet fearing to raise Vernon's hopes too much, "but she is in a swoon so deep that we cannot hope for her recovery (if she ever wakes) for

some hours. In the meantime, we must hurry onward, and as you, Mr. Vernon, require no lantern and have both arms free, strong arms upon which to cradle the poor child, you must carry her as carefully as you can, while John will guide you,—but remember it is a long way and a weary one, and if you find that your burden becomes too heavy for you, I will take her awhile again until you get rested.”

She was transferred to Vernon’s arms in silence, as though they were watching a corpse. All looked upon that beautiful still face with sympathetic pity, and many of the eyes there were filled with tears; some overflowed, but Florence’s were tearless, and a fire flashed from them as she saw that gentle head pillowed on Vernon’s breast, and the procession, so full of enjoyment in the morning, passed in solemn silence along, while all unheeded were the varied forms of beauty that lined their path.

And what were Vernon’s emotions as his arms enfolded that beloved form? Grow weary of *her*? Ask assistance from any one though the way were twice, ay, thrice as long? Ah, no, it was too sweet a burden that he bore. She seemed but a feather in his arms as he held her there heart to heart, with her unbound hair waving at times upon his very lips, and as thus he walked from the darkness into the light of day without, a vision seemed to come to him as he held her there, false perchance, but still blessed because it included her. The cave appeared to him as earth, and its devious perplexed ways, and the sunlight without, the opening heaven,—then a wild blissful thought entered his heart,

cheating him with its brilliant coloring, that even thus one day might he hope to enter heaven.

Often in tenderest accents he whispered her name, but the still lips gave no answer; then imagining that her swoon was truly death, he placed his hand upon her heart re-assured by its feeble fluttering that life was yet there. Often, too, his soul was torn with cruel fancies, and he feared that from that corpse-like repose she might suddenly wake to madness, and his footsteps quickened to reach the outer world and to know the worst.

At last they gained the entrance of the cave, and the fresh breezes of heaven brought something like consciousness to the insensible girl. Opening her eyes for a moment she looked vacantly around and sighed, then a faint smile played around her lips and she nestled more closely to Vernon's breast.

"Thank God," said Vernon, fervently, as he heard that life-like sigh.

His voice seemed to arrest her attention, though she appeared to try in vain to uncloset her eyes again, and her lips moved as though she were dreaming, while a few whispered words which Vernon's quick ear heard, made his heart throb wildly while she spoke.

"Oh, it was a terrible dream," the white lips murmured, "but it is over now; the longed-for peace has come at last."

"Sybil, dearest, my own beloved," whispered Vernon, forgetting all his noble plans of concealment, "God is good; He did not, will not take you from me;" but the impassioned words were all unheard. she only, like a

tired child, drew closer to his bosom, not even knowing where her head was pillowed, and soon Vernon heard her breathing in the calm sleep which betokens life and health.

At this a new joy and strength rose in his soul, and he felt there was still something bright in life—*Sybil would live*—then he yielded to the guide's remonstrances and gave her up to the care of his wife, who laid her upon her own pleasant couch, and used restoratives which completely aroused her to consciousness. Then Sybil begged to be taken home, and when told that she was too much exhausted for the drive, with almost childish petulance she prayed to be carried to her own room, knowing in its familiar precincts, with her books around her, the soft landscape without, and Linwood's calm picture of Evening within, that she would soon be restored. So they yielded to her entreaties, and entering their carriages with the blessing of the kind guide and his wife, who had reason, from the tangible reward which Vernon left them, to remember the day, they were soon on their way to Vernon Grove.

Sybil and Vernon were alone; he could not yield her to the care of another while she was still so weak and helpless, and when he found that she was unable to sit up, he drew her head upon his bosom and she rested gratefully there. She smiled her thanks, too prostrated in mind and body to utter many words, but remembering that he could not see such an acknowledgment, said with earnest simplicity, "Now I *know* your worth, my kind brother; what should I do without your friendly support?"

Vernon shuddered, but it was thus that he had taught



her to address him. Words of passionate affection quivered on his lips, but even had he dared break his vow, that was no time or place, when lying there still trembling and frightened, to tell her that the heart, near which she nestled, was beating, wildly beating, with anything but a brother's love for her who rested there.

Home being reached, Sybil insisted upon visiting her grandmother's room, but finding her well cared for and still in that imbecile childish state in which she had left her, gave herself up into the kind housekeeper's care, who brought her some simple nourishment and insisted upon her retiring at once to her own room. There, after a fervent prayer to God for her deliverance, and an upward look at her favorite picture, which she had remembered so faithfully and well, together with a thought if he who painted it had ever dreamed while he was executing it of the calming power it would possess, she fell into a slumber like an infant's, as profound and as innocent.

Vernon's inward struggle was too strong for sleep. "She calls me *only* what I taught her," said he bitterly, in the loneliness of the night, "but that word *brother*, though so tenderly uttered, chilled me through and through. Ah, never can I be to her anything but that, for have I not vowed it? And besides, she regards me only as such, and any knowledge of my love for her might annoy and disgust her, bereaving me even of a sister's affection." Then he made renewed vows of concealment, praying fervently that God would make him content that she should be the guardian angel of his life.

It is a mad thing for a man to enter the lists against

such a mighty power as Love, who even with folded or clipped wings can scale the heavens, or break through walls of adamant; and it was a new discipline for Vernon to guard himself against the thousand ways in which his heart was assailed by the tempter, where inclination invited its approach, and principle forbade it. It was a life struggle in which strength was opposed to an almost equal strength, but with Sybil's welfare on his side Vernon hoped eventually for victory.

## CHAPTER XV.

"Alas! the love of women! it is known  
To be a lovely and a fearful thing;  
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,  
And if 'tis lost, life has no more to bring  
To them but mockeries of the past alone."

BYRON.

"And underneath that face, like summer's oceans,  
Its lip as moveless, and its cheek as clear,  
Slumbers a whirlwind of the heart's emotions—  
Love, hatred, pride, hope, sorrow—all save fear."

HALLECK.

It has been said by some writer that, in every room of an inhabited house, either a tragedy or a comedy is being enacted, and could we follow the footsteps of a Faust, it would be easy to lift the curtains which hide them from view, but a privilege accorded to him is also given to the writer, who would weave into his story somewhat of the inner life of those whom he portrays.

In one of the rooms of the mansion at Vernon Grove, on her return from the excursion to the cave, sat Isabel Clayton, far other than the gay careless woman of the world that it was her ambition to be. She had dismissed her attendant abruptly, and seating herself at the window, was looking out with sad eyes into the prospect beyond. She seemed for once indifferent to appearances, for a thin shawl only covered her undraped shoulders,

and a simple white robe falling around her, had nothing in it of the effect which she daily studied in her fashionable attire.

Her face had all the requisites of beauty, and yet upon close examination, one might have detected there, perhaps in the lines about the mouth, weakness lurking amid the strength which was the characteristic of her other features.

She was restless, unhappy it would seem on this night, for with a quick impatient movement she closed the window, and taking a book in her hand tried to read, actually making an effort to prevent her eyes wandering from the page which she had opened, but with another hasty exclamation, she shut it again, and extinguishing her lamp, returned to the window, and throwing back the blind to its full extent, let a flood of silvery moonlight into the room. That wistful gaze, those hands pressed convulsively upon her heart, told that she, too, shared the doom entailed upon those of mortal birth, for she, in common with all, had her secret sorrow, her unsatisfied want, and her broken soliloquy revealed at once the character of her unfulfilled desire.

"Could it only be;" she murmured, "this one passionate wish of my heart, how my whole life would change; how with such a gift bestowed upon me, would this craving, which the world knows not of, be satisfied. I would love her as they tell me only mothers can love, my existence would be merged in her little life; popularity, the approval of the frivolous and fashionable, would be nought to me then, except as far as it administered to the wellbeing of my child, and when years had passed I should have a companion to cheer me when

the time comes, as come it must to all, when the shadows lengthen in the way. Her little feet would exchange the bounding steps of childhood for the more stately pace of womanhood, and like Sybil, she would shed the sunshine of her loveliness all around; but God wills it not to be," she continued more moodily, and with a sudden flow of scalding tears; "and to-morrow, and the next day, and for ever, I must appear to be happy still; play my part and be applauded; still cheat Clayton into the belief, though a child would be to him an idol, that our happiness is too complete to be increased."

Scarcely had the deep sigh which followed these words escaped her, when a gentle knock at her door made her hastily dry her tears, and almost before she had forced back the habitual smile to her lips, Florence entered her friend's presence.

Isabel started at her appearance.

She was as pale as death and almost as cold; her magnificent black hair was thrust back from her brow, and her lips were quivering with unspoken words of passion, while her eyes, those glittering oriental eyes, had a glare in them that was almost madness. Over her undress was thrown, like drapery over a statue, a white cashmere robe, which gave to the outline of her figure the almost stolid appearance of some antique marble form. Walking noiselessly up to Isabel as she sat at the window, she paused, while the pure moonlight clothed her magnificent figure in a sheen of silver light, then raising her arm slowly as if to give more emphasis to her words, she looked down into Isabel's upraised and wondering eyes, and said with a mixture of passion and

despair, "Isabel, you saw it, as did I; he loves her and he is lost to me for ever."

The impressive action, the slow, emphatic utterance of the words, the dreamy moonlight, the mysterious figure of Florence, all combined to make an exquisite picture, and Isabel, with perceptions always alive to the beautiful, in a playful tone, told Florence her impressions, but the latter stopped her at once by a gesture of impatience. Sinking down at her friend's feet, she clasped her hands, and looking earnestly into her face, spoke again, though in a softer tone.

"Isabel, *do you love me?*" she asked.

"You know that I do," said Isabel tenderly; "have we not been children together, have not our heads pressed the same pillow, and our hearts been open to each other for years; and to sum up all my affection for you in a little sentence, do I not wish you to be my sister and Richard's wife?"

Those last words brought a flush to Florence's cheek so radiant, that even in the moonlight, Isabel saw it crimson her upturned face.

"Isabel," she answered, as she rose once more to her feet and stood there again like a statue, but a statue endowed with quick life, "you say that you love me, and I trust you; but *your* idea of affection and *mine* may be different. I will tell you what it is to love; it is to be all, endure all for a beloved object; it is to lose sight of self entirely, to merge yourself in another's welfare; can *you* be all, endure all for me, and thus *prove* your love?"

Isabel grew frightened at Florence's voice and manner—"What is it," she asked, "that you want me to

do; perhaps it is more than one human being ought to promise to another."

"I will lay my whole soul bare before you, and then you can judge," was the answer. "Isabel, when I entered this house, it was my ambition, mark me, *my ambition*, to second your wish and be Richard's wife. I respect him, he is rich and noble, and therefore no mean mark for one of my aspiring character, and my ambition could have desired nothing farther; but a change has come over the spirit of my dream, and but one feeling reigns in my breast, but one emotion stirs my pulses, one thought actuates me now. Ask me not how it came, or what provoked it; if it was his dependent position on others which calls for tenderness, if the almost forgotten past, with the cruel part I played then, returns and upbraids me, I know not, care not, but that one feeling is *love for your brother*, so intense, so absorbing, that I would willingly give up all my dreams of distinction and wealth, and even were he reduced to poverty, these hands would gladly guide him, toil for him, this body suffer and die for him. *Now* do you understand. I *must* win him, and you alone can help me to do it."

"And what stands in the way?" said Isabel, "never did a task appear to me easier; you have all that even a most fastidious man would require for his happiness, beauty, genius, and all the fine qualities of the heart; win him and be happy."

"I see that you do *not* understand me," said Florence with fretful impatience, "there is an obstacle in the way which is not so easy to set aside."

"What a coward you are," said Isabel, taking her hand affectionately, "for such a queen-like, grand-

looking woman. Never yield to an obstacle, never let it frighten you into inaction; discard it, throw it away, scatter it to the winds, crush it under foot. Is it so mighty that it can neither be displaced by time nor energy?"

"Discard it, throw it away, crush it under foot!" was the response, "he guards her with too jealous a love; that obstacle, Isabel, is *Sybil Gray*!"

Isabel's silvery laugh rang through the room, a strange contrast to the deep earnest tone of Florence.

"Sybil Gray, little Sybil Gray!" she laughed. "She, then, is your formidable rival. Would you put the half-hidden violet in competition with the rose, shone upon and brightened by heaven's own coloring? Why, Florence, your obstacle has diminished into nothingness. She is a mere child compared with Richard, and besides, do you not see that she often calls him 'brother,' and treats him like one? Do not let her for a moment come between him and your wishes and plans. But stay; if you fear her influence at all, leave the matter entirely to me. I will tell Richard that she requires a change, first, in consequence of her long devotion to him in his sick-room, and second, because of the events of to-day, which will necessarily have an effect upon her bodily health. Convince him of this, and it will be an easy task for us to persuade him to allow her to go with us to the city. Once there, her wonderful beauty and gift of song will attract many admirers, and soon, surrounded by men enraptured with her loveliness, the child will discover that she requires something more than Richard's quiet approval of all that she does, and then we can make a match for her to our liking. But mark me,



Florence," continued Isabel in a more serious tone, "it must be what the world calls a *good match* in all points, for I love the artless innocent creature almost as much as I love you. The difference between you is, that you appeal to me with your noble gorgeous beauty and your devotion to myself, while she binds me with her more quiet and nameless graces and fascinations."

"With *these* she has won your brother's love," said Florence scornfully.

"I will take care to have her *débat* a brilliant one," said Isabel, not minding the interruption, "and she must and will create a sensation. Richard will soon forget her, and then we can pay him a second visit when she has left him for another's home and love, and there will no longer be a Sybil Gray to stand between you and your happiness."

Two beautiful creations they were, Florence clasping Isabel's hand, Isabel's face wearing a pleased satisfied expression at having arranged such a feasible plan for her friend, whose countenance was the very picture of Hope, and the bright moonlight flooding both with its silvery glory.

"How kind you are, dearest," whispered Florence.

"Should I not be kind to *my sister*?" returned Isabel.

"Hush," said Florence, in a playful tone of warning, "be not too sure, for nothing in life is certain;" but even while she spoke, her heart fluttered wildly, her eyes glistened, and she pressed a kiss upon Isabel's lips as a seal to her welcome words; then with a more buoyant step than that with which she had entered, she departed to her own room. The light, the loveliness of extreme youth seemed to have returned to her once more; her

eyes shone through a dewy moisture, her voice broke unconsciously into song, whose burden was passionate affection ; then she looked out upon the glorious night as she had never looked before, with a new interest, a new life, while her lips whispered a few words, an index to the bewildering sensation which made her so buoyantly happy :—" *This*, they say, *is love*, this feeling which makes the air softer, the heart lighter, the whole world more glorious ;" then their rich coral curled as though in scorn, her hands closed tightly, and a fiercer light burned in her eyes as a vision of a fair-haired girl, with a floating step, passed before her ; and she paced the floor with the air of a conquering queen, swept back the waving hair from her shoulders, and again the lips whispered or rather hissed other words, all unfit to have issued from her clenched teeth, the ivory portal through which they passed ; "*and this is hate and triumph !*"

And Sybil slept on, her white hands crossed meekly upon her breast, her golden tresses shading her seraphic brow, upon her lips a smile, and in her breast the quiet of a heart at peace with herself and all the world ; little dreaming that over her hovered those angels of destruction, marking out her future, and plotting for her *very life*.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"What shall I do with all the days and hours  
That must be counted ere I see thy face?  
How shall I charm the interval that lowers  
Between this time and that sweet time of *grace*?

Oh, how, or by what means, may I contrive  
To bring the hour that brings thee back more near?  
How may I teach my drooping hope to live  
Until that blessed time, and thou art here?"

MRS. BUTLER.

"Her voice is soft; not shrill and like the lark's,  
But tenderer—graver."

It was no hard task for Isabel and Florence to alarm Vernon about Sybil's health, and as if nature were plotting with them, she certainly seemed weak, and her cheeks grew colorless after her adventure in the cave. She seldom laughed that rich ringing laugh of heart merriment, but smiled instead, while her voice, which had burst into song as naturally as the voice of a bird in the woodlands, each day grew more mute, and the effort which she made to conceal what was passing within, only rendered her more unlike the bright and happy creature of the past. In fact a deep shadow had passed over the young girl's life, as is generally the case with all thinking beings after some great peril; she felt, with awe, what she had escaped, and the reflection made her

subdued and serious, so that Vernon, missing her accustomed playfulness, was easily persuaded that she needed a change. None but he, however, could tell at what a sacrifice he yielded to her going away from his own protecting care; none but he or one who loves and who feels willing to make any sacrifice for the welfare of the beloved one.

But Isabel, in her zeal for her friend Florence, not only wrought upon her brother's feelings, but upon Sybil's, telling her that it was Vernon's desire that she should visit the city, as it would, besides restoring her to perfect health, add to her advantages, improve her touch in drawing, and acquaint her with new styles of singing, while mixing in the most polished society would give to her manners a tone which one who had always lived in the country needed in order to be perfectly refined. As a desire of Vernon's was fast getting to be something of sacred importance in Sybil's mind, she consented to listen to her new prospects, but at the same time pleaded as an excuse for not readily assenting to Isabel's kind wish, her grandmother's precarious state of health. Isabel soon overruled that objection by saying that it mattered little to Mrs. Gordon what attendant she had in the present phase of her decay, and if the smallest change occurred, Sybil should be sent for at once. Finding that this last argument nearly caused Sybil to yield to the proposed change, with artful eloquence which was worthy of a better cause, she drew a picture of all that the young novice would enjoy, the genius of the stage, music, society, painting; the companionship of intellectual men and women, perhaps some of those very authors whose works were to her as

household gods, until Sybil, not proof against these new fascinations and Isabel's sisterly kindness, looked forward herself with intense pleasure to the hour of departure for such a bright and beautiful world of happiness.

The evening before the day fixed upon for the party to leave Vernon Grove brought with it varied feelings to all concerned. Vernon was unmistakably sad and gloomy, Isabel glad almost to child-like gaiety to escape once more to her old life of constant excitement, and Florence content to leave even the object of her passionate attachment because she would thereby arrive one step nearer the execution of her plans.

Now that the hour of departure was so near, there was a severe struggle going on in Sybil's heart, and she was gay, restless, sad, tearful, and joyful by turns. She now felt the significance of that dirge-like word "Farewell." Not only to Vernon would she be obliged to utter it, but to the faithful though unconscious guardian of her earlier years; to the kind domestics who had ever looked upon her with respect; and even the inanimate objects which had been her companions so long must be included in the parting; the landscape seen from her window, the trees which had sheltered her, the very humblest flowers which had sprung up in her daily path. Yes, even though the brightest future awaited her, Sybil felt that a parting was a serious thing.

"I *must* speak to you a few minutes alone," said Vernon to her, as Isabel and Florence bade them good-night earlier than usual, to make arrangements for the morrow; "but you seem so particularly happy that perhaps a sober quiet talk would not suit your mood."

Vernon had heard the laughing "good-night" from

Sybil which followed Isabel's injunctions to be ready early on the morrow, but did not see the bright tear which dimmed her eyes a moment afterwards when she turned towards his downcast face, and had judged her only by the first; but she made no answer to his question, so reproachful in its tone, except by twining her arm within his and leading him to his favorite seat, and then sitting, as was her custom before the arrival of their guests, on a footstool at his feet.

"Yes, I must talk to you before you go," said Vernon, "somewhat as we conversed before this hateful visit; I mean in the same familiar way; I must tell you with what a sense of unrest this coming absence of yours oppresses me, how I wish that the visit were over, and that this night, this hour, you had come back to me and Vernon Grove again. Ah, I shall miss you sadly, sadly, Sybil."

Her youthful hopeful heart could prognosticate no evil in that brief absence, and she tried to laugh away his fears.

"Turn to the bright side of the picture," she said smilingly, "and think of only *that*. Remember how many things I shall have to tell you of when I return, how many new songs to sing you; and then call to mind Mrs. Clayton's fine promises. This visit, she says, is to transform me into a being of almost ideal perfections; just think how graceful, charming, and accomplished the country girl will become under the new experiences which await her."

"I know all, can imagine all," said he, unmoved by her pleasantry, "but no bright anticipations are to me like a real presence. A blind man's world is narrowed

down, as far as relates to externals, to a mere point. What Sybil Gray *is*, satisfies me, I care not to look forward to what she *will be*."

Ah! how his soul longed to say a few words of love to bind her to him for ever, but he did not, would not; his sense of right guided him perhaps; or perchance the thought that he might so interfere with some brighter destiny which awaited her, checked him, and he only uttered the first word of his intended appeal; *one word*, she had often heard it from his lips, but never in such a way; one word, but whether the tone in which it was spoken was that of love or hate, unutterable tenderness or reproach, she could not determine in her own mind, but that it came like a meteor, as unexpectedly and as sudden, that it sent the hot blood tingling to her brow, that whatever it meant it filled her with a strange power—this she knew and felt, and the word was simply her own familiar name, "*Sybil*."

There was a pause for a moment, but her voice at last broke it,—

"I am listening, Mr. Vernon," she said.

"Better be silent," he answered impetuously, "than give utterance to that cold measured '*Mr. Vernon*.' I hate it, Sybil; it chills me through and through."

"I should have said *brother*," said she in a softer tone, and anxious to conciliate him, "but I am so thoughtless, so forgetful, that I do not always remember the word you wish me to say, and which is so pleasant to me to utter."

"No, nor that either," he exclaimed, writhing as though some nerve had sustained an injury, "let it be Richard, Sybil, and though it were earth's harshest sound, it will turn to music if *you* utter it."

Sybil tried and tried in vain to frame the word aloud, the distance was too immeasurably great between them, and it died away unuttered on her lips.

"I cannot, cannot," she said frankly at last, "it seems almost disrespectful in me to think of such a thing, you have seen so many more years than I have, Mr. Vernon ; and perhaps you do not know," she continued playfully, as she saw a threatening frown on Vernon's brow, and hoped by her pleasantry to drive it away, "that you even look older than you are, for since your illness a host of silver hairs have appeared shining out from among the darker ones on your brow, like a sort of cloak to mark the hour of your life, or perhaps to warn *me* about the difference of our years."

No sooner had Sybil uttered these words than she became conscious that she had done wrong, for a shade of intense sadness passed over Vernon's face, and mournfully was his answer spoken.

"You are severe, but just, Sybil ; meaning kindness, but inflicting wounds upon the very eve of your departure from the home where we have been so happy together."

"Forgive me," she answered quickly, "you see there is another lesson which you must teach me, and that is not to say anything impolite or unacceptable ; I am sure that I did not mean to wound you just now by my remark, and after all I should not be surprised to see the grey hairs in clusters upon my own head, following that terrible experience in the cave. There have been those, you know, whose hair has turned white in a single night ; I wonder that mine did not then."

Vernon passed his hand caressingly over her bright luxuriant locks.



"Ah," he said tenderly, "that was indeed a terrible hour; I scarcely could have lived had I lost my little Sybil then."

There was a trembling earnestness in his tone that went straight to Sybil's heart, and she longed to make entire reparation for the remark which she thought had pained him.

"I will tell you what I *will* do," she said half playfully, half seriously; "you know that I am going away to-morrow, and you will miss me so at Vernon Grove that it will seem a very long time before I return, particularly if I pay a visit to aunt Mary before I come back; this prelude is to make you sensible that the time of my being absent, and my large experience, will have added almost a cycle to my years, while you, remaining here, will be stationary for a while, and so I promise you freely and fully with this addition of years on my part, which will make us equal, that when I see Vernon Grove again, I will have courage to address you, if you still desire it, even by the name of the lion-hearted king."

A flood of joy swept through Vernon's heart; that promise brought her one step nearer to him, and it was a blessed thought that the word *Richard* would be converted into music by her lips; but no future pleasure could take away the present pang of parting, and he recurred to it again.

"How silent will the Grove be when you leave it, dear child; what shall I do without your voice, Sybil? I do not mean simply in singing, but in reading and conversing. The blind miss a voice almost as much as a bodily presence, and I have always pretended to read character by the voice. My blindness has thus taught

me to depend more on my instincts than ever, and my love and hatred for people are determined by their voices."

"You depend almost as much on a peculiar tone of voice," answered Sybil, "as the author of some lines I read the other day. I committed them to memory, and some day when I return and you are in want of entertainment and lonely, I will repeat them to you."

"And why not now?" he asked; "is it so late that you can not spare me a few more minutes? Ah, Sybil, by-and-by you will give to others in the dance far more time than that which you deny me; by-and-by you will forget me quite, or remember me only as the blind man who was so dependent upon you, and who wished for your companionship when you could be far better employed than by entertaining him."

Sybil had heard many a storm of anger burst from Vernon's lips, but quite unused to the querulous tone of reproach which was now in the ascendant, and sorry to have provoked it, she tried by her good nature to make amends for what had passed.

"I did not think that you would care very much to hear them now," she said, "and as for its being too late to recite them, that certainly was not my excuse, for I really feel as if I could not sleep to-night. I do not know after all, if you would like the lines as much as I do, for perhaps it is only their earnestness which recommends them; they are simply words from a very loving heart, linked together by a rhyme; by a loving heart, I mean one which loves as the heroes and heroines in novels love."

"What you have said of them does not take from me the desire to hear them," returned Vernon, "though

such love seems to be denied me, and though my whole life as regards the affections must be one long disappointment. But even if this be the case, I can still sympathize with the loving and beloved."

Sybil imagined that he alluded to his experience in regard to Florence, and her voice grew tenderer in its pity as she repeated the lines addressed—

"TO A BELOVED VOICE.

"Speak it once more, once more, in accents soft,  
Let the delicious music reach mine ear,  
Tell me in murmured accents oft and oft,  
That I am dear.

"Teach me the spell that clings around a word,  
Teach to my lips the melody of thine,  
And let the spoken name most often heard  
Be mine, be mine.

"Why in the still and dreamy twilight hour,  
When lone and tender musings fill the breast,  
Why does thy voice with its peculiar power  
Still my unrest ?

"Why does the memory of thy faintest tone  
In the deep midnight come upon my soul,  
And cheer the parting hours, so sad and lone,  
As on they roll ?

"Oh, if my passions overflow their bound,  
Or pride, or hate, or anger call for blame,  
Do *thou*, with earnest, mild, rebuking sound,  
But breathe my name:

"But show the better way by *thee* approved,  
Bid me control my erring wayward will,  
And at the chiding of thy voice beloved,  
All shall be still."

Burning words were upon Vernon's lips, even an echo to the burden of the lines, "*Thus, Sybil, my beloved, is thy voice unto me,*" but by a strong effort he forced them back, and thanked her calmly for her kindness."

And then the parting came.

"Good-night, Mr. Vernon, *almost* good-by."

"And are you going to leave me with a cold shake of the hand, Sybil? Are we, brother and sister, companions from the far past, from the years of your childhood, are we to part thus? Has not a prayer followed you if you but strayed from my presence? Have I not watched you, taught you, cared for you, loved you, and can you think of no way to leave me to my loneliness but *this*? Can you give me no memory but what a stranger gives to a stranger, the common every-day clasp of a hand?"

It scarcely needed these words to overcome Sybil, who had been in a state of excitement for the past few days, and suddenly a shower of tears rained from her eyes. Though it was too late to retract, it seemed to her now that the time was really approaching, ungrateful in her to leave her benefactor, her friend, her teacher, particularly since he now appeared somewhat reluctant to have her go.

"I owe you all that I am," sobbed she, like a poor penitent child; "you have taught me everything, teach me now. *How* should we part, tell me, and now as ever, I would obey my teacher's most trivial wish."

The strong man trembled for a moment, half unclosed his arms, yearning to enfold her in his embrace and to keep her there for ever, resisted the impulse, and crushed some rebellious thought which had nearly overmastered him, then folding them tightly over his breast, a shield

against the strong temptation which beset him, bent down, pressed a fervent kiss upon her brow, blessed and then released her.

Sybil departed to her own room, but twice paused on her way thither as she thought that she heard her name borne to her by the wind as it rushed through the long corridor, but hearing it not repeated again, concluded that it was only her imagination. She was the more ready to admit this conclusion as she had just left Vernon; he had said his last words, and the rest of the household were hushed in slumber, and she soon lost all memory of it in the little preparations which still remained for her to make for the morrow's journey. Had she traced the source of that mysterious cry, had she returned and beheld Vernon wildly entreating her to have mercy upon him and to leave him not; had she heard his passionate words of affection and the touching appeal addressed to her in his despair, perhaps her destiny would have been decided then and there; but it was otherwise decreed, the morning's sun saw Sybil's departure from Vernon Grove and its master, to behold them, if ever again, how and when?

## CHAPTER XVII.

"Tis a proud chamber and a rich,  
Filled with the world's most costly things  
Of precious stones and gold;  
Of laces, silks and jewelry,  
And all that's bought and sold."

"And her face is lily-clear,  
Lily-shaped, and drooped in duty  
To the law of its own beauty.

And a forehead fair and saintly,  
Which two blue eyes undershine,  
Like meek prayers before a shrine.

And her smile it seems most holy,  
As if drawn from thoughts more far  
Than our common jestings are.

And if any painter drew her,  
He would paint her unaware  
With a halo round her hair."

Mrs. BROWNING.

"So, your toilette is finished, Sybil; it is well, for our guests will arrive presently. Like a patient audience I have been awaiting the rising of the curtain, and now I am ready to applaud or condemn. Are you sure that art and nature leagued together have done their very best? Before I judge for myself I must have that lamp to the left shaded somewhat, and the other raised, so that

I may see the effect of that new *coiffure* upon your style of face. People, like paintings, should only be criticised in certain lights. Incline that wave of hair a little more upon your brow, there, that is more artistic, and now, Sybil, I cannot help it if those Madonna-like eyes of yours are raised in pious remonstrance, for I must say what I think,—you are beautiful, positively the most beautiful”——

Sybil's beseeching look at Isabel, and her white-gloved hand laid upon her arm, arrested her words.

“Well, I will stop, since you wish me not to be personal, and will generalize and modify what I was about to say. After all, fashion is *the* thing; take even an ugly woman from the dairy, Frenchify her a little, and she will become quite handsome under refined and refining hands, while you, Sybil, ah, I dare not tell you what you have become.”

Isabel might have been pardoned for gazing in admiration upon the lovely face and form before her. It was the night of Sybil's *débat*, and she had yielded herself to her friend's hands to be attired as she wished; and Isabel, guided by her perfect taste, had chosen what was most appropriate in its simplicity, pure white, gauzy and floating, and almost like gossamer in its fine texture. Let others wear what they choose, she said, let Sybil load herself ever after with gems and finery, *that* night she belonged exclusively to her, and she should have no ornament save her own faultless beauty, and she was satisfied with the result, even the fastidious Isabel.

Sybil had been one week the inmate of Mrs. Clayton's city home; she was used to luxury, but not such as this; she had dreamed of enjoyment, and was more than

satisfied; for here she met with kindness on every side, and everything seemed to minister to her taste for the beautiful. Isabel was delighted with her fresh unspoiled heart, and had taken her *protégée* under her peculiar care, first because she felt somewhat the sacredness of the charge, and again because the young girl, whom she had brought from her retired home suddenly into the glare of the great world, was a curiosity to her, something new under the sun, and her very straight-forward simplicity of character, so in opposition to her own worldly training, interested her as a study; while Clayton, fancying what she fancied, took Sybil at once to his heart and home, rejoicing that his wife found something to amuse and interest her. Of Florence, that regal woman who always appeared to Sybil as if newly stepped from her throne, she saw comparatively little, nor did she regret it, for the old feeling of the dove in the presence of the hawk, fluttered her too much for her sensations to be those of perfect peace. As a reason for her sudden withdrawal from the world of fashion, Florence had declared herself weary of society, expressing a contempt for its forms and institutions sadly at variance with her former tastes, while she expatiated largely upon the delights of a country residence, and thus, though Sybil knew that she was frequently closetted with Isabel, discussing some matter seemingly of importance, seldom did she meet her in the never-ending round of engagements into which she had been drawn by Isabel.

On the night of Sybil's *début* Mr. Clayton's house was to be opened to a large circle of Isabel's friends, and Sybil's heart beat tumultuously as she descended to the gorgeously lighted rooms, and thought of the contrast



which that evening would present to her past secluded life; it was a new and not perfectly agreeable ordeal to her because of her embarrassment, and she half shrank back from the blaze of light which she encountered. A friendly glance, however, met her, and a friendly hand took her own, and she felt relieved to find that as yet Mr. Clayton was the only occupant of the room, while a few pleasant words of approval of her simple dress tended still more to reassure her.

"It argues well for her future obedience to my commands," said Isabel fondly "to be so entirely guided by my wishes; her dress wants nothing in its airy grace except perhaps a set of pearl ornaments. *They* might indeed add to the purity of her appearance, for there is something in their unostentatious beauty that softens without gilding, and one can fancy the holy women of old, if wearing jewelry at all, preferring only pearls."

Mr. Clayton smiled and looked tenderly at his lovely wife, who seemed for once to forget herself in her interest for another, and then with an air of mystery placed a casket in her hands.

"You always said, Isabel, that I was your good fairy, and lo, here are what you have just wished for, a set of pearls for Sybil. I heard you say that her dress was to be of white, and knowing that there could be such a thing as painting the rose and gilding the lily, I trust that she will accept them, and I shall be amply repaid by your approval and her wearing them to-night."

Isabel impulsively threw her arms around Clayton's neck, much to the detriment of her elaborate *toilette*, while Sybil thanked him with eloquent words, and certainly when they were clasped around her snowy

neck and arms, one might have wondered how she had seemed so fair without them.

"I wish that Vernon could see Sybil now," said Clayton, who was not included in the secret shared between Isabel and Florence, "he would think that she was some spirit draped in earthly robes; he must be lonely enough at the Grove, with no joyful tongue to give him welcome home; why did you not bring him with you, Isabel?"

"The truth is," said Isabel, frowning a little at the unwelcome introduction of his name, "that I did ask Richard to accompany us, but without any hope of success, for he said that he should not feel at home anywhere away from his every-day haunts, and so refused my invitation; and now remember, Clayton, I want *his* to be a forbidden name while Sybil is here, for fear that it will bring back old memories of birds and flowers, and make her want to fly away to the woods once more."

Tears came into Sybil's eyes, pearls brighter than those which clasped her fair neck, for she thought of Vernon and her grandmother alone in their solitude, but she brushed them away hastily as the bell from the hall sounded. It was not indeed the quick energetic ring of an aristocrat's footman, but so near the time for the assembling of his guests as to lead Mr. Clayton to expect them and to advance forward a step, while the white-gloved waiter threw open the doors with a grand air of importance.

No perfumed and jewelled lady entered, however; no dainty gentleman with unimpeachable toilet, but a woman coarsely attired, with a hollow-eyed child in her arms, advanced with shrinking step into the room, shading her eyes with her rough hand from the sudden blaze of light.

“What does the woman want?” asked Clayton of the astonished waiter, “and how dare you admit such a person at this hour, at this time, into my house?”

The woman answered for herself in a sad voice, and in hurried words told a pitiful tale of misfortune and affliction, looking down anxiously at intervals upon the child as though to assure herself that each quick convulsive breath that it drew was not its last.

Her husband, she said, together with herself and child, had taken passage in a vessel bound for other shores, and while on their way a storm had overtaken them and their vessel became a wreck. Many on board had perished, and among the rest her husband, whose dying struggle she had witnessed without being able to give him any assistance, and she and her child might have shared his fate if another vessel, in passing at some distance, had not seen their signal of distress and rendered assistance to the few miserable survivors who were clinging to the wreck, their strength almost spent by their exertions. Her child and herself, it was true, were saved from drowning, but a worse fate might await them through poverty and hunger, which must soon bring them to the grave, for upon landing, the captain of the ship which had rescued them, told her that she must seek at once for employment, as he could no longer afford to add to his expenses by maintaining those whom he had saved; and so without food or clothing, with a sick child and a heavy heart, a stranger in a strange land, she had gone forth to seek her fortunes. Seeing bright lights in Mr. Clayton's house, she had stopped there, hoping that the noble exterior might betoken wealth, and plenty, and benevolence—she but asked a shelter for the night, or

the wherewithal to obtain one elsewhere, a shawl to wrap her shivering child in, and a word of advice from the kind gentleman and lady of the house, she added.


Piteously were her eyes turned upon the group, who were interested in spite of themselves in the narrative, but another peal of the bell at last determined Clayton's plan of action.

"My advice is," said he frowningly, "that you depart from these doors at once. The city provides a refuge for such as you, and if you choose, you can go to the authorities and there palm upon them your improbable story; these rooms were lighted for guests and not for importunate beggars; depart at once, and let them have entrance."

"So much to *me*," thought Sybil, glancing at her costly pearls, "so much to pleasure and pomp, and nothing to *her*!" She could have torn the rich ornaments from her arms and neck if she had dared, and trampled them under foot, while Isabel seeing her emotion, hummed a lively air and tried to draw her away, saying that Clayton had done what was but right, as he was constantly assailed by impostors who tried, under false pretences, to extract money from him. But Sybil stood rooted to the spot. The woman's pale face flushed at Clayton's cruel words, and she looked straight into his eyes as if to be assured of his meaning, then shuddering perhaps from cold, perhaps from some uncontrollable impulse of despair or weariness, she drew the moaning child more closely to her shrunken breast and walked slowly from the room, while her miserable robes brushed the silken garments of the gay party who ascended the stairs.

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Sybil would have followed her and have rendered her the aid which Clayton had denied, for she felt and knew that the strange sad tale was true, but Isabel held her back, and in a passive dream-like mood, she heard her name in an introduction, and then came fresh arrivals, and the incident was for that night forgotten, but ever after Sybil's conscience reproached her for not being more prompt and acting with more independence; nor did she plead as others might for her, her inexperience and the peculiar circumstances under which she was placed. Often did she think of Clayton's avarice, which led him, though spending thousands for his own pleasures, to refuse needful aid to that wretched beggar, and of Isabel's apathy as she besought a shelter; and as the besetting sin of their characters unfolded itself to her, she felt that at God's bar of justice she would rather have the heart of that poor woman beating beneath its scanty rags, than those of the proud owners of that costly palace home.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Never 'till now—never 'till now, O Queen  
And wonder of the enchanted world of sound,  
Never 'till now was such bright creature seen,  
Startling to transport all the region round!  
Whence com'st thou—with those eyes and that fine mien,  
Thou sweet, sweet singer? Like an angel found  
Mourning alone, thou seem'st, thy mates all fled,  
A star 'mong clouds—a spirit 'midst the dead."

BARRY CORNWALL.

ISABEL had not miscalculated; Sybil's praises were upon every tongue; her grace, her peculiar style of beauty, her dignity, and the inborn refinement which showed itself in every movement were commented upon, and had Isabel staked her success or failure in society upon the issue of that evening's impression, she must have been completely satisfied. Sybil herself was quite unconscious of the position which she had attained; she simply felt intense enjoyment in the fine music and the companionship of beautiful women and intellectual men, and dreamed not that she had gained in a few hours a summit which had been often toiled for in vain by the society seeker and fashionist.

Isabel, who watched her young charge with Argus-eyes, soon perceived that there was one among the crowd who, spell-bound by Sybil's loveliness, seemed unable or unwilling to resist her fascinations, engaging

her in conversation whenever he could, or when not conversing with her, standing apart and gazing upon her every movement. With the quick intuition of a woman of the world, she, in her own mind, wove Sybil's destiny, and linked it with his who was so evidently interested in her *protégé*, quite satisfied with him as one whom even Vernon himself must welcome as every way worthy of his beloved charge.

Arthur Leslie, the person in question, was a man of a calm, steady temperament, far-seeing and cautiously judging; seldom impressed by externals, and almost cold in manner. Eschewing all the vices of society, he nevertheless entered largely into its pleasures, and was a favorite with both sexes, as much for his independence of character as for his uniform good nature. A disposition so well balanced is seldom to be met with, and Leslie, but little past that period when the law determines a man to be of age, had the judgment of riper years, and men much older than himself looked up to him for advice. He had passed unscathed, heart free, through two seasons in society, and as much for his weight of character as for his wealth, was still the anxious solicitude of manœuvring mothers who almost despaired of the attractions of their daughters.

When such a man loves, he loves with his whole soul, and if there is such a thing, if the whole loving power springs into being in one instant, as a flower bursts into bloom in a single night—if in an instant one's happiness or misery is decided by the smile or frown of another, then Leslie loved Sybil Gray. Her look of purity first attracted him, then her face at rest enchained him as being that of an angel, but when she smiled, all that was

beautiful of earth seemed to glow in the mirth which shone in her eyes or in the curved arch of her coral lips. He first thought how it would brighten life with such a ministering spirit hovering near to warn him of evils and temptations, and then the vague thought took the more definite form of a wish, carrying him back to his lonely home, where, instead of the solitude, he longed to have her seated as his own household treasure; or meeting him with her welcoming smile. But Leslie was not a man to be beguiled by a fair face or form, and he was determined before he yielded to the bewildering emotions of happiness, which were already giving to his life a joy unknown to him before, to find out what the casket, which was so attractive without, contained within, and when, after seeking an introduction, he found Sybil's mind bright and cultivated, he gave himself up to the new-born feeling as though to one hope, thought, aim in life, and rested under the charmed spell with an abandonment which he dared not and cared not to resist. He felt, too, after conversing with Sybil, that she understood him; that his passionate longing for sympathy was all revealed to her; that she admired the books which he admired, and even the same passages of poetry had fascinated them both. Then they had trodden over the same ground in science, except that where she had only ventured to skim the surface, he had plunged boldly, and her weaker nature seemed to lean in confidence upon his stronger judgment and more extended experience.

Theirs was no fleeting, ball-room conversation, but an earnest finding of each other out, a continual glad surprise to discover that their tastes and pursuits were so much in accordance, and Leslie would have monopo-



lized her for the entire evening, if Isabel had not had other views for the young novice. She wished Sybil to feel her own power, to taste the intoxication of general admiration, to be the queen of the many as well as of the single worshipper who had fallen almost without a struggle a captive to her charms; she wished her to be so impressed with the pleasures of society as to desire to forsake the country and its tamer attractions for ever. Watching, therefore, for a favorable opportunity, she sent Leslie away upon some trivial errand, and, as if in contrast to her late companion, introduced to Sybil an old and valued friend of hers, a venerable minister who occasionally came from the solitude of his studio to lend countenance to what he thought were the harmless amusements of the gay outer world.

As Sybil looked up with a smile of greeting to the benevolent face before her, she thought that in his very air there seemed to be benediction, a sort of "bless you, my child!" which words were indeed in the old man's heart, although unspoken, and by an involuntary impulse she extended her hand which he clasped in his with fatherly kindness. Then when Isabel left them, he drew from her a recital of the principal events of her almost uneventful life, and promised to be a friend to her upon the perilous path into which she had entered, and while she thanked him with eloquent words and moistened eyes for his kindness, he gazed wonderingly upon her glorious beauty, and remembering what a dangerous gift it was, he warned her of the poison in the cup, and told her to beware while she was drinking the intoxicating draught, not to drain it to the very dregs.

Sybil was so pleased with her new companion, his

interest in her simple country life, her rural church, and her schemes for her poor dependants, whom, by Vernon's generosity, she was enabled to relieve, that she gladly accepted his invitation to walk into the grounds where the music would not be a drawback to their conversation, and which a genial day of lingering summer had made pleasant even in the early autumn. There they found numerous guests who preferred the quiet pervading the moonlit gardens to the more enlivening dances of the ball room.

The grounds were laid out under Isabel's and Clayton's direct supervision, and the result was a combination of beauty and order which always accompanied the exercise of their united taste. There was no lack of ornamental shrubbery, and fountains, and figures of classical meaning, where the mythology of the ancients was woven into a thousand exquisite creations by the hands of modern artists. Now a marble Cupid would be seen lurking almost hidden among the foliage with bow strung and arrow ready for flight in his chiselled hand, or an Aurora would meet the gaze, the very embodiment of beauty and the type of the light and loveliness of day.

Sybil's new friend was well acquainted with the mystic meaning of each symbol, and it was no slight enjoyment to her to have him reveal them to her, or to find him drawing from her own book knowledge the explanation which he desired to convey to her. The thousand fancies which she had formed of the wild and exquisite creations of pagan idolatry now assumed a definite shape, and her delight was almost child-like when she discovered without any prompting from her companion, from some

symbol which was attached to the numerous sculptured forms around her, the name and office of the carved images; thus a light and airy figure in a little grove of trees, holding in her hand a vase of exquisite workmanship, drew from her the exclamation, "Ah, that must be the Hebe of the Greeks!" and she knew at once by her quiver and arrows and the crescent on her brow, that Diana stood before her in the radiant moonlight.

It was appropriate and unique too, both her companion and herself thought, to find Bacchus reclining at his ease among the arbor of grape vines which hung around him, and Pomona guarding the province where the orchard began.

All this was intense enjoyment to her, resembling somewhat the fresh feeling of pleasure which one has on an island coast in gathering valuable shells of varied forms and colors, and as great was her delight when her companion explained to her the more obscure meaning of the figures, for Vernon's aim in Sybil's education had been for her to take pleasure in constant acquirement, rather than in display of what she knew. Thus she felt that she had gained something when he pointed out to her a marble Silence, with its symbol rose, a chained Prometheus, or a Galatæa standing in her chariot shell.

But the crowning beauty of the garden was a kind of Grecian temple which Mr. Clayton had erected for a summer resort, and to this Sybil's new friend now led her, as much for the view which was to be obtained from it, as to see its exquisite proportions. It belonged to no peculiar style of architecture, though claiming something of the simplicity of the Ionic order, together with the inverted bells and acanthus leaves of the more ornamen-

tal Corinthian type. A flight of marble steps led up to a mosaic floor, white fluted pillars sustained a dome of white marble, so light and graceful, that Sybil, deceived in the softened moonlight, thought that it was transparent, and traced with her eye the delicate veins which crossed and recrossed each other over its polished surface. Pausing on the last step as she ascended, she disengaged her arm from her companion's, and paused to view the scene beneath her so exquisite, so like a sudden vision of fairy land.

It was more like a dream to her than a reality as she stood there gazing upon the gleaming statues, cold and motionless amid the living groups around ; the full calm moon unveiled to the burning glances of some worshipping Endymion, and her own mysterious self suddenly transferred from the companionship of Nature only, to that of a world of highest Art. Then her glance rested upon the silvery hair and noble brow of him who had guided her through that labyrinth of beauty, and whose eyes were directed upward as though he were communing with the inner heaven, and she thought how the soul there on that uplifted and expressive face made it more glorious than aught else ; and from him her thoughts wandered to Linwood, and she wondered if he ever portrayed what was noble and beautiful in man as well as in woman, in his pictures, and if he did, how that rapt, almost God-like countenance would make for him a grand study. And from Linwood her thoughts winged themselves far away from Italy, across the ocean, beyond the tree tops, through the murmuring woods, past the shining river, over the tree-crowned hill, to Vernon and her country home.

"And would you return to it and him?" said the voice of her conscience; "would you leave this fairy land of enjoyment for one moment *there*?"

And she answered almost audibly to the questioning voice, with a heart all unspoiled by the fascinations which surrounded her—

"I would leave it all for one moment there."

"Sybil," said Isabel, suddenly springing up the steps and interrupting most effectually her reverie, "this is just where I wished to find you, for this, you must know is my cage, and you are the bird whom I would most like to hear sing in it. I did not bring you into the garden before, because I desired the full beauty of the scene to break upon you to-night, and you *must* be satisfied, for earth, air, and sky, smile upon us and lay their tributes at your feet. Every life, dear Sybil, has some stand-points in memory, some bright or gloomy points to date from, and if you forget all other nights in your life, you must promise me to remember *this*."

Isabel's words were strangely earnest, but she meant nothing beyond the mere impression which the hour produced upon Sybil's mind; but often after did the latter recur to them as prophetic, for truly above all the nights or days in her life, had Sybil cause to remember that eventful night, the stand-point in her memory, looming up above other points of time.

"There are not many listeners," continued Isabel, "and here just where you stand, just how you stand, against that marble pillar, I must hear you sing."

Leslie now joined them, and added his entreaties to those of Isabel, and the old companion of her walk, although silent, looked expectantly at her, as though to

grant their request would delight him too. Sybil replied to his glance with a kind look of interest; she longed to do something in return for what she thought was his kindness, in teaching her so much which was new and interesting, and to repay him for his good nature in taking the trouble to amuse one so far his inferior in age and attainments.

"And would you like to hear me sing too?" she asked, "would not music such as I could give you only break the charmed spell which is around us? If you think not, tell me what kind you most admire, or if you like music at all?"

"To be candid," he replied, "I fear that I must say that *I do not*, for the intricate melody of the present day bewilders me, and I do not profess to understand or appreciate it. In my youth there were some songs that went deeper than the mere organs of hearing, sinking into the very soul, but they have passed out of vogue, and you would laugh at me were I even to name them."

"You are mistaken," said Sybil with emotion, while a sweet smile of sympathy broke upon her lips and rippled up to her eyes, "and to prove that I love those almost by-gone melodies with their tender pathos as much as you do, I will sing one for you, which I am sure will seem to you like an old friend."

Then before an objection could be raised by the frowning Isabel, her voice rose upon the air like a part of the exquisite night as the stars were of the sky, thrilling all hearts with delicious cadence in one of those old-fashioned songs, those ballads of eld, which seem made for any time and place, and each sound was hushed under the blue

dome of the heavens save the tinkling of the murmuring fountains and the voice rising in melody over all.

It was a song which brought back the old man's youth when life and hope were fresh, and the memory of a beloved voice which had sung it in those happy days,—and he bent his head, calling back the by-gone hours, while he silently wiped away the tears that flowed unbidden from his eyes. As the last thrilling words were uttered, he pressed Sybil's hand and uttered a fervent "God bless you, dear child;" then quietly passing through the crowd who stood breathlessly waiting for another utterance in song from that marvellous voice, he bent his way homeward with the happy memory still stirring in his heart.

"Now, Sybil," said Isabel softly, "I forgive you for that breach of taste, because the old song was so beautiful and sad that my own careless heart was touched and my eyes moistened, but as you have paid your tribute to the aged part of your audience, you must sing us one song brimful of love and life, exclusively belonging to youth.

A song for love and youth! What should it be? Sybil remembered one which she had found among Vernon's music, a song to *The Winds*. It was unlike any other combination of sounds that she had ever heard, a wild, weird-like tangled harmony, seemingly as reckless as the winds themselves, now soft as a murmuring zephyr, and then mad and sweeping as a winter blast. She felt in a mood to sing it, though she knew that most of her listeners could but little appreciate or understand, unless they had received a musical education, the perfect adaptation of the music to the words, but the feel-

ing could not be resisted; some would understand it and to these she would address herself, and again the tinkling fountains joined the song of *youth and love*.

"Some love the stars that peer like angel eyes  
Through the blue veil of curtained paradise;  
Some love the flowers upspringing in their way,  
And some the wood-bird's sweet and plaintive lay,  
I love the Winds.

"Not with a nature calm, that brooks control,  
Love I the changeful Winds; but with the whole  
Wild and impassioned fervor of my heart,  
That of my inmost being forms a part,  
I love the Winds.

"Why do the Winds for others bring alarms,  
For me a thousand never-ending charms?  
While poets sing the flowers, the sun, the trees,  
Why do I sing the wild Æolian breeze?  
Why love the Winds?

"I love them for they come on pinions strong,  
Fresh from thy presence; morn and night I long  
That on their swift wings I might fly to thee,  
And round thy form for ever lingering be  
Where'er thou art."

As the murmur of applause, which could not be suppressed in listening to the wonderful compass of her voice, met her ear, Sybil drew back with no feeling of self-gratulation in her heart, but with a sad weight of sorrow, for the song recalled to her Vernon in his blind solitude and the pains which he had taken to perfect her in it, bidding her sometimes sing it when she was alone for his sake.



"There, not another to-night, dear Mrs. Clayton," she said, "some other time, but not here, not now."

But Isabel pleaded still—"Only that Italian air which you sung the first day of our arrival at Vernon Grove. I shall ever remember Richard's expression," continued she unguardedly, forgetting her own resolves to have his a forbidden name, "as Florence and I described you to him when you approached the house with your garland of flowers; he either had not been curious before, or was afraid to ask any one what your personal appearance was, for fear of being disenchanted as regarded some preconceived notion of his, and so when your voice came to him, and he recognised your identity by that, the play of his features was perfectly beautiful; he looked at first almost sorry, I do not exactly know why, and then a glad smile covered his whole face at finding out, I suppose, that you were pleasant to behold as well as good and amiable."

Sybil smiled too, a rare and beautiful smile it was, and to Leslie it was like the red flush of the western sky over some beauteous lake.

"Help me to plead, too, Mr. Leslie," said Isabel, turning to him as he was gazing at Sybil, who was looking upward in happy reverie.

"Oh, I could not, could not sing that now," she said earnestly, "it is too soulless, too meaningless for such a night as this; the words are mere words without a spark of feeling, and some gay, sunshiny day I will remember your wish and sing it to you; I am sure that Mr. Leslie will agree with me now that he has heard what good reasons I have for refusing."

Sybil raised her eyes to his for an instant, those eyes

whose common, every-day expression was one of tenderness, with a beseeching glance, and from that moment he gave to her his heart, his whole loving heart. Isabel's presence did not restrain him; he saw nothing, knew nothing, felt nothing, but that Sybil was bending towards him awaiting his answer.

"Life could give me no higher happiness," he said in a low tone of intense emotion, "than that of yielding to your slightest wish."

Sybil blushed at his earnest gaze and still more earnest words, but attributing them to the common gallantry of society, was soon at her ease conversing upon other subjects, while Isabel, quite satisfied with what she saw, turned away to her other guests.

On the outer circle of the crowd which had surrounded Sybil, and which was now beginning to disperse, stood two men unknown to each other, and who, meeting as guests of Mr. Clayton's, entered without an introduction into conversation.

"Can you tell me the name of the lady who has just finished singing?" said the younger. "You will pardon my question, asked so informally, but I have just entered, and am almost a stranger here, and though fresh from the land of song, and the very cradle of music, where art is cultivated to the utmost to give a higher inspiration to nature, I have never heard her voice surpassed."

"I am as ignorant as you are," replied the other, "of the lady's name, but I agree with you in thinking that her voice is an extraordinary one, and I never heard notes which so 'touched my inner nature through;'" then with a courteous bow he passed on to learn something more of the sweet songstress.

The younger stranger waited until the crowd dispersed, and then coming in search of Mr. or Mrs. Clayton, his steps were arrested suddenly by a vision which his eyes beheld. He stood for a moment in deep thought, then passing his hand dreamily over his eyes, exerted every faculty to assure himself that it was not a phantasy of the imagination that he saw, but a living breathing reality.

He was an artist, and had just returned from his studies in Europe. While there, he had painted a picture, the head and bust of a female, an Ideal, which had at once placed him in a position of eminence in his art, and she who stood before him, white robed, her fair hair just stirred by the night breezes, her blue eyes upraised, and her lips closed though smiling, in the light of the full orb'd moon, was, strangely enough, his picture's second self. He could have gazed there for ever until the living ideal melted into air, or taking wings soared upward into its native heaven, but fearing to attract attention, and not yet having made his arrival known to the mistress of the house, he withdrew from the moonlight, and behind the shelter of a trellised vine still kept his gaze fixed upon the marble temple and the fair form which so filled him with admiration and wonder.

Suddenly he felt a hand grasp his, and Isabel's low well-trained voice, with a shade of surprise in its tone, addressed him.

"Albert Linwood! this is indeed a pleasure; I am glad to welcome you; glad, too, that your appreciating artist-eyes should have seen our grounds to-night; when did you return, and why have you not been here before?"

Albert returned that friendly grasp with a pressure as sincere, for Isabel Clayton's doors were always open to

her brother's friend, and a long course of undeviating kindness on her part and her husband's had endeared them both to him.

"I came only this very afternoon," he said, "and after attending to some necessary business transactions, hastened to see my old friends. There is no change, at least in one," he added smiling, "except that perhaps the years have turned back in her case; but I long to hear of Vernon, how is he, where is he?"

Linwood's words were addressed most certainly to his companion, yet even while he was speaking of him who was so dear to him, and to whom he owed so much, his eyes wandered to his living ideal, and Isabel read his admiration in his fascinated gaze.

"Vernon is well, and in the country still," she answered, "and ah, I see that you are attracted, as every one else is, by my sweet Euterpe in her shrine. Of course you heard her singing; and did you ever enjoy anything more than that contrast of songs, the one so sad and tearful, the other scientifically brilliant and playful? One might have thought that she had studied effect and looked for admiration in the selection, if one did not know the exquisite purity of her character. Come, Albert, and see my goddess in a nearer view,—let me introduce you; I would like to have you know more of Sybil Gray."

"What a strange coincidence," said Linwood in return, "the name is a very familiar one to me, 'tis the same as that of Vernon's little amanuensis; are they related?"

Isabel's merry laugh rang out bell-like and clear—"Why should it be strange?" she said, "that is she herself, Richard's little Sybil Gray."

Linwood drew back—"I cannot have the hardihood to approach her," he said; "I dare not, must not, until I have in some degree restored my self-possession and reconciled what she is with what I imagined her to be. For years I have been corresponding with her, and foolishly lost sight of the fact that the little Sybil must grow into a woman, the bud expand into the flower; moreover, I have not confined my expressions to the simple name by which Vernon designates her, but 'dear Sybil,' 'dearest Sybil,' 'precious and beloved child,' have often begun and ended my letters. What apology can I make to the exquisite woman so far above me there, so almost angelic in loveliness?"

Isabel only laughed merrily again, and linking her arm in his, drew him forward.

"Sybil," she exclaimed, hurrying him up the marble step before he could escape from her gentle force, "here is a knight who has woefully offended you:—his life is in your hands, but I recommend him to your mercy, because he has come humbly to ask pardon for all his sins against you, past, present, and to come. Let his penalty be as light as your gentle nature can make it."

Before Sybil could answer her mysterious address, or ask for an explanation, she beckoned Leslie away, and passing on toward the house with him, left Sybil and the stranger alone.

She raised her eyes for an instant to his face, and met a deep searching gaze of curiosity and admiration; something, such a look, she thought, as one might bestow upon a picture when seeing it for the first time.

"I know not how you have offended me," she began, dropping her eyes again, and feeling that the pause was

very awkward, "since Mrs. Clayton has left us, will you please to explain?"

"If to have thought of you always as a child, as Vernon's little Sybil, is to have offended you," he said, "then assuredly I am guilty, most guilty."

"There is no offence," answered Sybil gently, "in thinking of me thus; nay, it is rather flattering than otherwise, inasmuch as we know that as we mount higher and higher towards the meridian of life, we lose the freshness and innocence of childhood, and so *I* would be ever, if I could, *little* Sybil, in heart at least. But you must explain yourself more fully still, for I only know of one other besides Mr. Vernon himself who could think of me as you have, and he is far away from us now, an artist in Europe."

"A friend of yours?" asked the stranger.

"Why yes, no; after all, yes," replied Sybil; "Mr. Vernon, with whom my grandmother and I have lived ever since my childhood, is blind, and for this reason I have written almost all his letters for him, those to Mr. Linwood especially, and from the formality of a beginning our correspondence has continued and extended into a very long one, and although I have never seen him, I feel as if I had known him all of my life.

"That is indeed a novel position," returned the stranger, apparently much interested in what Sybil had said, "and have you any curiosity to see your unknown correspondent?"

"Oh, yes," said Sybil joyfully, "his name, daily mentioned, is almost a part of our life, and his return a bright promise of the future; he may come, perhaps, the last of this very year. Mr. Vernon prizes his friendship so

much, and so entirely depends upon his sympathy and judgment, that I think his feelings are reflected back upon me, and I look forward to his coming as a sort of jubilee."

Sybil felt curiously at her ease with this stranger whose name even she did not know, but the whole of her visit had been so dream-like, so many experiences had she encountered that were far different from her sober country routine, that this, she felt, was after all but a part of the dream through which she was passing.

"Have you ever imagined what kind of character this Mr. Linwood is?" continued her companion—"in mind and person, I mean."

"Of course," said Sybil, warming in the cause of her absent correspondent and friend, "it is a pleasure to me often to dwell with Mr. Vernon upon that never wearying theme. First, I know that he is as gentle almost as a woman, because Mr. Vernon has told me so, and likewise I have heard what a devoted attendant he proved when his friend was ill; and I know, too, that he is noble and pure minded, and filled with enthusiasm for his art, which he follows with untiring devotion. He is a worshipper of beauty in every form, but more especially the beauty of woman. As for his personal appearance, it seems to me from what I can gather from Mr. Vernon's memory of it, that it must be just what an artist's appearance should be; he is not very tall, but still enough so for symmetry; then he has a high white forehead, with eyes like the Lady Geraldine of Mrs. Browning,

'Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-stone.'

And his voice, Mr. Vernon tells me, who lays great stress



upon the intonations of a voice, has a manly tenderness in it that wins one at once to like him. And now that I have been able to paint his picture so faithfully in words, I am sure that I should know him if I were to meet him unexpectedly."

"*Would you?*" said the stranger in a tone that startled her with its depth and earnestness, "would you know this Albert Linwood of whom you speak so flatteringly, so much above the estimation in which he should be held?"

Again she raised her eyes and they met his, and a sudden thought came to her which brought the blood to her face and then left it again as pale as the marble against which she was leaning. No maidenly shame caused her to veil her eyes now with down-dropped lids; there was a deeper feeling in her mind overcoming that and making it only secondary. Coldly she scrutinised him, taking in his face and figure in that one searching glance, and she needed no other assurance to tell that there before her stood the person whom she had just so minutely described. She wondered why she had been so obtuse, she hated him and herself for the ruse which he had practised upon her, and looking once more straight into his eyes with a gaze from which there was no escape, while a smile of scorn curled her lip, she said with an indignant gesture which was a near approach to anger—

"*You are Albert Linwood!*"

"Forgive me," said Linwood, reading her indignation too well, "forgive the temptation which led me to do what I now feel was wrong."

"Unfair, unjust," were the only words which she condescended to say in return.

Albert took her hand, but she drew it away in disdain



and turned impatiently away, preparing to descend steps in order to avoid his further companionship.

"You are offended," he said, making one more effort at a reconciliation, "and justly so; but I cannot be your displeasure; forgive me, I pray you; forgive my mad and thoughtless experiment."

"What you have done," she answered unrelentingly, "is unworthy of the Albert Linwood whom I have known so long. You cannot be, you are *not* he."

"And so this is your promised jubilee, Sybil?" he said sorrowfully. "What can I do more than confess that it was not right; nay, let me give my conduct its proper name, it was ungentlemanly, and as you say, unworthy of the Albert Linwood whom you have called your friend, and I would not repeat it for any consideration that could be offered to me, no, not for one of your smiles, Sybil. I will make one more appeal to you which may rend your heart of steel, not pleading in my own name, but in the name of another who deserves your favor more than I do—for Richard's, Vernon's sake, will you not let his friend be yours? for his sake forgive and forget my thoughtlessness."

Her forgiveness was gained at once—Sybil held out her hand and smiled.

"For Mr. Vernon's sake only," she said.

And thus peace was bought, and as few could resist Linwood's fascination of manner and conversation, before many minutes elapsed they were conversing with the freedom of old friends.

"And so you could not prevail upon Vernon to take the journey," said Linwood, after a reconciliation was entirely established, "and to let me be your *cicerone*

among the fair scenes with which I became so familiar."

"No," answered Sybil, "it was in vain that I read your appeals to him; he shrinks more and more from the bustle of travel and society, and besides, my grandmother's health is so precarious that it would have been neither convenient to taken or to leave her; and moreover, we were quite satisfied with our own land for the present, for beautiful and attractive as must be the scenes which you have visited, there are some things here which would favorably compare with any in any other country. For instance, what could surpass or compete with the loveliness of this night?"

"It is indeed a glorious night," replied her companion, "*everything* is beautiful that I look upon now; but setting aside the world of art, and granting that we see the same moon through the same atmosphere, and that the *nights* are equal in beauty, there is one thing which I should like you as an admirer of Nature to see, and that is one of Italia's own sunsets—*then* you might indeed say, 'my soul has a memory of beauty which will last me for ever.'"

"And yet," replied Sybil, "I have been so well pleased with our own, that day after day, from a hill near Vernon Grove, I never wearied of gazing upon our evening skies, each afternoon presenting something new in character, sometimes gorgeous and golden, or grotesque and wild, and then calm and uniform as a tranquil sea. It was a quaint conceit of mine, belonging rather to fairy land than to the domains of my own quiet imagination, that the spirits of the landscape painters of the past were permitted in turn to try their skill and to leave an impress of their peculiar style upon the heavens on each succeed-

ing evening ; so at one time I would have before me the great panorama around me Wilson's sublime life-linimng ; Burnet's rainbow-touched pencilling ; Claud inimitable and delicate coloring, or Berchem's superb blending of light and shadow looming over magnificent sky-cloud scenery ; and once, Mr. Linwood, I trembled, for one balmy evening not long ago, the whole heavens were clothed in a sheet of glowing sapphire, exactly resembling the skies in your picture of evening, and I thought that your spirit might have flown upward to that sunset painted by your invisible hand to tell them of your departure."

And as thus they conversed, almost better friends, if possible, for their brief estrangement, the hours fled swiftly until they were reminded by the departure of the guests from the garden of the lateness of the hour, then conducting Sybil to the house, he bade her and the Claytons adieu, promising to call upon them the next morning, a promise which he was only too happy to make and fulfil.

The night had merged almost into the dawn when Isabel, who had prevailed upon Florence to play a quiet part in the pageant of the evening, sought her just before her departure to exchange a few words with her. They were entirely encouraged in the success of their plans, for to them Sybil had seemed to fall an easy prey into the schemes which they had laid for her, and to enjoy the homage offered to her with such zest, that they considered their victory already complete. This, together with the openly expressed admiration of Leslie, who united in himself all that Isabel had classed under

the head of a "good match," led her to throw her arms around Florence at parting and to call her in tender tones her "beloved sister," bidding her to be of good cheer, for such a fair beginning must of necessity make a favorable ending.

And for Sybil, too, that night of enchantment had passed away, and she stood at last in the solitude of her luxurious apartment, with cheeks glowing with excitement and a throbbing heart, thinking over the events of the past few hours. She scarcely, however, felt herself to be alone, for her figure was reflected from head to foot in the spacious mirror which hung before her in its gilded frame, not as that Sybil Gray whose unassuming costume in her home at Vernon Grove had scarcely given her a thought, but as a Sybil Gray of the fashionable world, around whose bare neck and arms were entwined costly pearls, and whose golden gossamer ringlets no longer hung naturally upon her shoulders, but were arranged in the more womanly style of a studied coiffure. For once in her life she looked at herself attentively and curiously, and a deeper flush stole to her cheek as she beheld the radiant image there. Suddenly she awoke to a knowledge of her power, a dangerous knowledge, and one upon which the nice moral balance of character has often been wrecked. It was no simple trial which came to her then; herself became the tempter, that fair strange image which smiled as she smiled, and toyed with the circling bracelet upon her arm. She had a right to be proud, it said, if she would but remember the homage that she had received; it bade her recall the minutest circumstance in that evening of triumphs; Leslie's words, so defe-

rential and tender; Linwood's look of admiration; the rapt attention with which all had listened to her songs; those numberless introductions, and last but not least, Isabel's words at parting—"good-night, my flower of the forest—I am proud to have you transplanted here." "What was that monotonous country life, where each day was like another, in comparison with that varied, fascinating, joyous existence for which she seemed especially made?" asked the mirrored image.

Not causelessly had Vernon trembled as he gave her his parting blessing; the world's breath was welcome already, nor did she turn away at once from its perfumed incense.

"What shall arrest these bewildering wandering thoughts," said another voice which she knew was the clarion voice of conscience; "what shall take thee unspoiled back to Vernon Grove, ere selfishness, pride, and folly enter and obtain possession of thy heart? Be true to thy better nature and seek a safeguard."

Sybil made her choice, wavering but for an instant. Quickly unclapsing her pearls and divesting herself of her gauzy drapery, folding her luxuriant hair in less artistic bands around her head, she extinguished the blaze of light which had revealed to her that tempting picture, and kneeling down penitently ere she slept, she sought and found that safeguard which she needed;—*it was prayer.*

## CHAPTER XIX.

"In the song-voice, in the speech-voice,  
There is but one far off tone;  
In the silence of my bosom,  
But one burning throb alone—  
But one form of shade or brightness  
In the mazes of my sleep,  
One pearl of snowy whiteness  
In my memory's heaving deep!

How I glory, how I sorrow,  
How I love with deathless love—  
How I weep before the chilling skies,  
And moan to God above!  
I am higher, I am prouder,  
Than if stars were round my head;  
I am drooping, I am lonely,  
As a mourner o'er the dead!"

ALBERT LINWOOD did not confine his visits to Mr. Clayton's house merely to the day after his return to his native land, but was a constant guest there; a welcome one, too, was he, and besides being an acquisition to the pleasant circle gathered there, Sybil was learning to look for his coming with pleasure and to call that a disappointment which kept him away. He was so genial, even-tempered, and frank, his conversation was such a fund of information and amusement; he was moreover so handsome and refined, that when his bright face looked

in at the door it was always greeted with smiles. And besides these considerations there was really a great deal to be talked about by Sybil and himself,—subjects that had only been touched upon in their letters; Vernon, her grandmother, the Grove, and paintings and works of art innumerable, so that Sybil, from looking forward to his presence simply with pleasant anticipations, insensibly came to regard it in the light of a necessity and right, and Linwood's place by her side was always reserved as a matter of course.

Leslie's visits were almost daily also, and Florence and Isabel soon began to perceive, that although Sybil did not receive him with the warmth that she showed to Albert, her manner was not sufficiently forbidding to discourage him, and they felt that his devotion, his manly bearing, and his wealth must eventually impress her favorably and wake in her heart the slumbering passion of love. They were convinced, too, from her perfect unconsciousness, that this must be the work of time, and Sybil received him as she would any other visitor approved of by Mr. and Mrs. Clayton, until an hour arrived which awoke her from her dream of ignorance and fully enlightened her as to Leslie's real sentiments.

Linwood came one morning, quite excited about a picture upon exhibition, to invite the Claytons and their guest to visit it. It was but just completed by a young artist of great promise, who was a friend of his, and as Leslie was present he included him also in the invitation. The picture was hung in a hall which contained several other fine paintings, all objects of interest, to Sybil especially, who, in consequence of occasional lessons

from Albert, was now beginning to detect a copy from an original, and readily to discover different schools of art. She named with unerring judgment, from some peculiarity of coloring or execution, painters of different styles; and Albert was never weary in instructing her upon these points or letting her into the secrets of the profession which was to him the one absorbing aim of his existence. But the chief present attraction in the hall lay in the picture which he had brought them to see, and which was entitled, *A Happy Home*.

The lights and shadows in the painting were quite remarkable, and the grouping life-like and distinct, telling its own story, as being just what it was intended to represent. The skies and scenery were purely Italian, portraying that out-of-door existence which is lived beneath Italy's genial skies. Before a cottage door sat a woman with that rich voluptuous charm of beauty, which is to be met with in no other clime, and upon her figure the eye rested as the prominent one in the group. But not long was admiration of her in the ascendant, for there were other details to claim the attention. There was none of the bustle of active English life in the picture, but a dreamy indolence which breathed only of rest, tranquillity, and freedom from thought of what the morrow might bring forth. The hour was sunset, and at the feet of the woman reclined a stalwart man in his peasant's dress, who appeared to have thrown aside some implement of toil; and the half-satisfied, half-weary look of the husband was in excellent keeping with the other points in the picture. But the woman with her superb dark eyes, and the man in his luxurious attitude of rest, were not wholly engrossed with each other, for the



glance of both was directed to the figure of a child in the distance, crowned with flowers, and hastening on to her cottage home. The gaze of expectancy in the child's face was finely contrasted with the mother's of pride and the father's aspect of quiet happiness; the calm which breathed from the whole scene, together with the rich glowing coloring of the whole work, was unmistakably full of merit, and bespoke for the young artist a certainty of future fame.

Each one of the party, who was indebted to Lira for a sight of the painting, admired it for its different points of interest, now for its gorgeous colors, now for the loveliness of the woman, or the manly beauty of the father, while Isabel was particularly attracted by the unstudied grace of the child of southern skies. John, on the other hand, simply looked to the whole, and in his own matter-of-fact truthful way, admired for what it really was, the embodied idea of an artist's dream of a happy home.

Isabel and Albert at last wandered off to the pictures in the room, while Sybil and Leslie, satisfied with the one before them, remained still examining the beauties, which increased apparently the longer they inspected it and from whatever point of view.

Assured that they were alone, Leslie ventured upon a topic which he felt that his happiness imperative demanded should be broached, and interrupting a paragraph of criticism which Sybil was making, he asked her what her ideal of a happy home was, "I mean," he said, "if you had the power, how you would depict it on canvas, and how embody it so that others might see it and copy it with their own?"

"I scarcely know," replied Sybil, "I have never thought; but it seems to me that it would be hard to put on canvass just what I conceive to be *happiness*. It lies not so much in scenic representation as in expression; not so much in expression as in something which is internal and cannot be portrayed. To give happiness and to be happy is nothing tangible, but is simply a power emanating from one to do and be what would please others, although from the fact of one so acting an expression of divine beauty must emanate, and if I had the genius I might paint such a face, and every one would know exactly what to call it."

"Your answer is a vague one, I think," answered Leslie, "though I understand you; were you to ask *me*, I think that I could define my idea much more clearly than you have done yours. I could embody my dearest and best wish in a picture which would be to me even more attractive than the ideal of Mr. Linwood's friend."

"I would like to hear you describe it," said Sybil innocently, turning upon him the full light of her eyes, while she met a glance which brought a radiant blush to her face. The blush brought a confession which had been trembling for days upon his lips.

"A happy home," he said with a tremor in his voice, "I have never thought about until lately; I have never even cared for enjoyment beyond the present hour, and have been content to play my part in society, to admire beauty, to appreciate wit, and to return to my books and home avocations often with a feeling of relief—but now, lately, there is a new thought in my heart underlying every other thought, and pervading my whole

being. The realization of it as I desire will make my life one long season of intense and satisfying joy; to be disappointed in it *must* make my utter misery. You must have perceived, Miss Gray, that I am not like most men whom every fair face and form attracts, that I have no passing fancies, and that life and its every-day occurrences are to me serious things. What I do and am, do and am *in earnest*, and it is the aim of my existence to be true, and now that you know something of my disposition, this prelude will prepare you for what I am about to say. With me to love once, is to love for ever and to love at all is to give my heart, my hopes, my being into the keeping of her whom I feel that God has appointed, whether she return my affection or not, to my life-angel. It is my joy and my pride to say that it is thus that I love you, and to ask you, with a heart trembling upon your decision, to be my wife, the guardian of my life, and to lend the light of your presence to my home to make it what it can never be without you *a happy one.*"

All forgotten was the picture before which they sat so engrossed were they with each other, Sybil regarding him with wonder and pity, tears glistening in her eyes which from the shade of sadness in them were now almost of a violet darkness,—and Leslie leaning forward to catch her faintest whisper which would bid him hope or despair. It seemed to her as if he, on that eager greedy gaze, must read what was passing in her heart and that she might be spared the answer; but no, he wanted words.

"Speak, Miss Gray," he said almost imperatively "this suspense is positive torture; only say one word to

end it; say that there is hope for me and that those tearful eyes bespeak it."

Thus appealed to, the blood flowed away from Sybil's face, a trembling seized her, and her hands became icy cold, for she knew what an utter death of hope her answer must bring.

"I cannot," she began, but so unprepared had she been for his sudden avowal, that she knew not in what words to couch her answer, and how to be cruel and yet kind, and the accents died away upon her lips; one more effort she tried to make, but seeing Isabel and Linwood approaching, she stopped confusedly.

"Think of what I have said," said Leslie in a low tone, as he read anything but hope from her countenance; "it is best to think it over, and then to tell me calmly of my fate; but oh! Miss Gray, Sybil, if it be possible, be *merciful*; you hold my happiness or my misery in your hands."

Sybil stepped into the coach, which was to convey her home, like one in a dream; Isabel and herself were alone, while Albert and Leslie followed in the carriage of the latter. Isabel found her companion strangely silent, and when she asked her some trivial question about the pictures, or pressed her to give her opinion of a distant view which they were passing of spires rising above a charming landscape, Sybil looked so distressed and asked her so beseechingly to let her be left to her own thoughts for awhile, that Isabel, fancying somewhat the state of the case, indulged her in her wish,—not that she imagined such a preposterous finale to Leslie's devotion as a refusal from her young *protégée*, but she thought that he might have said some tender words which had

sunk deep enough into the quiet current of Sybil's soul to agitate its peaceful flow,—something which she, in her usual silence, was dwelling on retrospectively with emotions of pleasure.

When they reached home, Albert assisted Isabel to alight, and Leslie hurried forward to conduct Sybil up the steps which led into the hall. The shades of twilight were deepening, and yet there was light enough in the heavens to reveal to his anxious gaze a smile upon Sybil's countenance, had there been one, or a glance of answering love, but he looked in vain, and she felt that the agonized inquiring expression of his face was a question which demanded a full answer, and it came from her lips in accents of deep sorrow.

"I have thought it all over," she said softly, "and it can never be."

Then with this certainty of his fate hanging over him, the world reeled with him, and he seemed like one stunned by a sudden blow, and looking upward as if to appeal to a higher power, he exclaimed, "Teach her, O! God, to be merciful!"—but no star met his gaze, no ray of hope, only the blank skies and the coming twilight.

One more appeal he ventured upon, and his voice was turned to unutterable tenderness as he uttered it. "Will not waiting," he said, "will not months, nor years, will no probation, no trial or constancy, bring me nearer to my only earthly happiness?"

Sybil shook her head, and her face must have indicated how much she herself was suffering in the protracted interview, for suddenly remembering that he was keeping her there on the threshold, perhaps against her will, like one who sees a door which shuts him out from happiness

Closed against him and doggedly accepts his fate, he put out his hand and clasped Sybil's in his own, bidding her an eternal farewell.

"If you cannot love me, pray for me, Sybil," he whispered hoarsely, "for I shall need your prayers in my solitary wretched home."

With eyes filled with tears, Sybil watched him for an instant as he walked slowly down the steps like a man suddenly overtaken with blindness, then hastening past Isabel and Albert, who were awaiting her in the hall and wondering what delayed her so long, she paused not until she had reached her own room, and there in a passion of tears her heart overflowed because, though it could not have been otherwise, she had wounded a true and manly nature, whose only fault had been in loving her too well.

Sybil pleaded a headache, and remained in her own room during the rest of the evening, and after Albert's departure, which was much earlier than was usual, Isabel, thinking that her services might be needed, went to offer to her any assistance she might require. It needed no assurance on her part to convince her kind hostess that she was suffering, for her eyes were heavy and swollen, and a bright red spot burned in either cheek. But she was tearless now, for the storm had passed over and had left her comparatively calm and satisfied. She felt that she had done right, for she had subjected herself to rigid self-examination and had decided that she could never have given him the love which he demanded, and to an all-absorbing passion like his, she felt that it would have been mockery to offer the substitute of friendship. She had concluded, too, as Leslie had signified to her that he

was about to depart from her presence for ever, that it would be but just to explain the cause of his absence to Mrs. Clayton and to keep nothing back from her knowledge.

"It was kind in you to leave your guests and come to me, my dear friend," she said as Isabel entered and inquired if she felt any relief from her headache; "the pain which I felt has nearly passed away, and was simply an attendant upon a sad experience which it has been my lot to encounter this evening, and which agitated me more than I can express. Your interest in my welfare, however, is but one among your many acts of kindness to me, and I would return it by a perfect confidence on my part. Mr. Leslie told me this evening that I had it in my power to decide his happiness or misery"—

"And of course you have decided to make him happy, dear Sybil," said Isabel embracing her; "I must congratulate you upon the conquest of such a noble and worthy man."

"I told him, noble and worthy as he is," said Sybil gravely, "that I could never be his wife."

A shade of disappointment and vexation passed over Isabel's face. "Foolish child!" she said, you will regret this; you will repent of this mad folly. Mad and foolish I term your conduct, because there is not one within the whole circle of my acquaintance who would not deem an alliance with Mr. Leslie as an honor and an advantage, and so you should view it; unless," she added, looking full in Sybil's downcast face, "the heart that he asked for is given to another, the love that he would win be already another's prize."

Sybil raised her eyes frankly, nor shrunk from that long and scrutinizing gaze.

"No," she said simply and without any confusion, "I do not love another. A mighty love must draw me to make me give my time, my affections, my life to one, as you have given yours to Mr. Clayton. Every recess in my heart I must probe before I could say to one who sought my love, 'with you I could pass a lifetime;' some thoughts like these passed through my mind as Mr. Leslie eloquently besought me to pause ere I gave him a final answer, and then I was certain that I could not—could not love him as a wife should love a husband, nor could my life be the happy sunshiny life that yours is."

"And you think that *I* am happy?" said Isabel sadly, forgetting for a moment her young friend in herself.

Sybil started at that unusually solemn tone, and for an instant looked anxiously at Isabel, for her question seemed to imply a doubt.

"So have I always deemed you," she said with candor; "so have I always thought that a woman must be who has married a man whom she has chosen from all the world, and who has no wish ungratified. If happiness consist not in this, then what is it," she asked, "I mean the happiness which springs from married life?"

"Is there nothing more out of God's treasury that he can give?" returned Isabel passionately, while hot tears coursed each other down her face; would nothing help to fill up the tedious hours of these long lonely days? Did it never occur to you, Sybil, that this grand house is too quiet, and that the prattle of a child, the silvery tones of a youthful voice, the loving clasp of a dimpled hand, the pattering of little feet, the trusting look in an



infant's eyes, might make me happier? Oh, Sybil, you cannot realize the longing, you cannot fathom the intensity of that one wish of mine, breathed in vain to the earth, the air,—ay, to Heaven itself, and denied.”

For a brief space of time Isabel's proud form was bent and her face buried in her hands in a momentary struggle with herself; when she looked up again it wore its accustomed calm careless beauty, and her light musical voice was no longer broken and sad.

“How foolish I was to intrude my troubles upon you,” she said, “when we were discussing yourself and not me; Sybil, forget them; think once more that I am just what you imagined me to be.”

“I cannot forget that you are not happy, dear Mrs. Clayton,” replied Sybil.

“But I *am* happy, child,—forget my folly in revealing to you my one wild ungranted prayer; and now let us turn back again to yourself. Answer me candidly, Sybil. Leslie, you say, is out of the question; tell me, then, with those truthful eyes of yours looking full at me, if you are sure that you love no one else?”

“Whom should I love?” said she. “Mr. Vernon, my grandmother, Mr. Clayton, and yourself, are my world; beyond it, and the love which I meet there, I know of no other love; believe me, for I would not deceive you, dear Mrs. Clayton.”

Isabel was satisfied, and yet as she stooped to kiss Sybil's brow, she could not resist another appeal to the foolish child who had thrown away such an amount of positive good as the rejected hand of Leslie. “You had better let me call him back,” she said.

“No, *no*,” said Sybil more emphatically than before;

While Isabel bade her good night laughingly, and left her alone once more. Disappointed in the result of Leslie's suit, but satisfied that Sybil was heart-free, she left the sequel to time, and waited to consult Florence upon the next step which it was advisable for them to take. The conclusion that the friends eventually arrived at was, that Sybil, without being aware of it, was interested in Albert; and as her conduct to him each day made surmise conviction, they rejoiced once more together that, though not far-sighted enough to foretell the termination of their former plans, they could not now be mistaken in their newly-raised hopes.

## CHAPTER XX.

"On a sudden, through the glistening  
Leaves around a little stirred,  
Came a sound, a sense of music, which was rather felt than  
heard.

Softly, finely, it inwound me—  
From the world it shut me in—  
Like a fountain falling round me,  
Which with silver waters thin  
Clips a little marble Naiad, sitting smilingly within,  
Whence the music came, who knoweth?"

MRS. BROWNING.

ALBERT LINWOOD, previous to his acquaintance with Sybil, had only been a worshipper of art; the rose on a fair woman's cheek was not to him an index of health, or an eye bright with intelligence an earnest of the mind within, they were merely regarded by him as fit subjects for his pencil; and so absorbed had he been in his studio among his paintings, that the thought of love for any of the fair forms, which often looked in upon the rapt artist as his pictures grew upon the canvass, or for the *habituées* whom he met in the fascinating whirl of society never entered into his imagination. Life contained for him but three objects, all centring in the first, and they ranked thus:—improvement in his profession until it had reached a point where fame would be a certain

reward, next Vernon's approbation, and lastly a return to his native land, crowned with honors.

Thus the first evening that he saw Sybil, and the moonlight discovered to him her radiant loveliness, he felt the true artist-emotion of admiration for what was so singularly exquisite, nay more, he regarded her as something which was of greater consequence to himself, a model. In her fair hair he saw a realization of Titian's dreams of beauty, in her blue eyes the very shade which he had so nearly portrayed in her own picture, his Ideal. Then her "coloring," in artist's phrase, was so much like that which had been handed down from early times of art, and which the painters of the modern schools tried but in vain to copy, that he longed for his easel to take a new and perhaps successful lesson from nature; and her form, so lithe, yet so firm and full, was a study in itself. But though Linwood's admiration was excited, his heart was not touched; if a stray wave of hair escaped from its fastening and glittered like gold in the sunlight, he thought how easily with brush in hand he might make the circling rings enduring; did the shadow of her dark lashes rest for a moment upon her glowing cheek, and did her face assume a thoughtful expression, at once in imagination he encircled it with a halo like another Madonna.

In this absence of all heart-worship lay Sybil's unconscious trust of him, for had his voice breathed love or his eyes looked it, she would have shrunk back into herself frightened at the perfect confidence which she had reposed in him; but as Vernon's friend, as her correspondent, as the familiar guest of her friends, Sybil gave herself up to the charm of his society, which

contained a fascination that few could resist. Soon however there came a change unperceived at first by her and almost unfelt by him, so like was it to the gradual coming of twilight over the sea, so silent in its approach, nor did he realize it until he discovered that there was a higher object in life than even rivalling the great masters in painting, and that so he gained it, content was he to spend an existence inglorious and void of ambition, and *Sybil's smile was this rival to his art.* As a flower opening to the sun he gave one by one every leaf into her keeping, and then his whole heart lay bare, all her own; she was the light, the warmth, the sun that had given life to the flower upon which they had rested, and to him this new experience, this developing growth, was a blessed dream, more enthralling and absorbing than any of his old dreams of distinction and power.

A fear that he should offend her, a desire to make himself acceptable to her in every way, were now his ruling passions, and a wish of hers, however simple or extravagant, if possibly attainable, was always attended to and gratified by her ever-watchful admirer. Daily, rare and beautiful flowers, arranged with all the knowledge of an artist's combination of colors, graced her table; music he brought her when fresh from the composer's hand; exquisite plants and books, and all those little gifts which are too simple to be returned or refused by the most fastidious, and which were dictated by a perfectly refined taste and a thorough knowledge of the forms of society.

One evening, the conversation taking a general turn at Mrs. Clayton's, music was discussed, its soothing or exciting influence, from the first lullaby sung to the

almost unconscious infant, to the stirring strains of a martial band. It was a wide field for one who was at home upon the subject, and soon all were listening to Albert as he touched upon different styles of music and the softening power which it had exercised upon mankind, not forgetting the rude drums of barbarous nations, the harp and timbrel of the Scriptures, the wandering minstrels, the organ with its solemn appeal to what was religious in our nature, the piano with its varied powers, the viol and its lively measure, and lastly night music sounding in the serenade beneath the window of some listening lady fair.

Sybil's eyes grew brighter as she listened, and hers was the next voice that spoke. She always regretted, she said, that the days of chivalry had passed, and that she had not lived in the olden times, when through the casements of their "ladye loves" the gallant knights told of their affection in song, or a band of instrumental music came softly borne on the night air mingling in a sleeper's dreams.

"You talk as though the fashion were obsolete," said Isabel, "when, in truth, serenading is as customary as ever; it did not die out with Blondel, nor yet with Shakspeare's enamored heroes, and though I cannot boast of a plumed chevalier, with guitar strung by a blue ribbon on his shoulder, pouring out his admiration in a love ditty, yet I have often had a modern serenade so beautiful in its perfect harmony of varied instruments that I have felt glad to be able to say that I belong to the present age rather than those which are past."

"How delightful," said Sybil, "a serenade must be. It must appear like going to sleep soberly in this every-

day world, and awakening in fairy land to hear midnight music."

That night Sybil slumbered in the sweet sleep of youth, that deep unconsciousness, that dreamless state which seldom comes to us after we have had struggles and sorrows, but at midnight she started from her couch trembling with delight, for just beneath her window a melody uprose, so sweet and exquisite in its every note, that she thought it must be the music of a dream.

A first serenade! What moment in a young maiden's life can compare with it! What a feeling of pride and importance it gives her; with what a timid, trembling hand a taper is lit; how hastily and yet gracefully a shawl is thrown around her white-robed form: how her cheek flushes as she draws near the window and screens herself behind the protecting blind. Then how all personal feeling is forgotten in the cadence of sweet sounds; how the white feet keep time to the melody, the lips murmuring the while inaudible thanks to the mysterious visitants who unseen minister to her pleasure. Ah, it is an experience never to be forgotten, at least so thought Sybil as she listened with her whole soul to the midnight music.

As she thus stood with heightened color, more brilliant because of the crimson curtains which lent a still deeper glow to her flushed cheeks, Isabel softly entered with her finger on her lip enjoining silence, and they listened together to the delightful strains.

They were a contrast too striking, too beautiful to be passed unnoticed; the one so brilliant and changeful, yet so lovely withal, with her restless eyes, quiet for a moment, and a smile upon her parted lips, every faculty, as it were, wide awake, and listening with her whole being; the

other in the shadow, softer, gentler, her eyes half-closed, her head resting upon her hand, and every limb in an almost statue-like repose, every sense dreaming, every emotion lulled into quiet by the harmony.

A sudden silence changed them both, to Isabel it gave a voice, to Sybil an awakening from her delicious trance, while the footsteps of the performers died away in the distance.

"Do you know to whom you owe this pleasure?" said Isabel, "do you know to whose thoughtful interest you can trace your *first serenade*?"

"It could scarcely have been for me," said Sybil, "or if it was, it must have been performed by some invisible spirits of the air who heard my wish to-night."

"You owe it to Albert, Sybil; how kind he is, how he is ever planning for the lady of his thoughts happy surprises, unexpected delights."

"He is indeed good, and thoughtful, and kind," answered Sybil.

"It is the way that he tells his love, dear child," returned Isabel.

Sybil blushed crimson, a blush of pleasure, Isabel thought, but it was one rather of pain to her to whom this revelation came.

"Yes," said Isabel in answer to the blush, "it is love which dictates all that he does; a love, which, when you come to return it in its full depth and purity, will make your happiness; and which Richard will sanction with his whole heart, for you are both very dear to him, his little Sybil and his friend Albert."

Sybil sat down; her limbs would not sustain her; she felt suddenly cold and trembling.



"Tell him, tell Mr. Linwood," she began, she was going to say, "*not to love me*," when Isabel interrupted her with a kiss and hastened from the room.

Sybil did not sleep after Isabel had left her, but kept vigil until the dawn. "What if Albert really loved her," she asked herself "as Leslie had; Albert, Vernon's friend? What if he were to say to her, 'you can make my happiness or misery,' and if her answer were to be as before, 'it can never, never be,' how would Vernon regard her after her rejection of one he loved so well?"

Sybil was bewildered; she longed for a friend to whom to turn for advice and counsel—but whom had she? She was alone there though surrounded by human beings. With Isabel she could scarcely sympathize; Clayton was too much immersed in business to give her any but a passing notice, and Florence too cold and forbidding. To Vernon himself she might have applied, but he was too far off for any communication of so delicate a nature, and her aunt Mary, whom she knew, rather by what had been told her than by personal acquaintance with her character, to be kind and tender-hearted, too much a stranger to her to ask for her advice. And so, like many another inexperienced girl, pressed hard by circumstances, mistaking fancy for the delicious ennobling feeling of love, trusting to do right, yet almost knowing that it was wrong, fluctuating daily, hourly in purpose;—in a moment, when there seemed to be no other refuge, no escape, with her heart far away from her words, and her lips colorless and quivering she promised to be Albert Linwood's wife.

But we are anticipating.

The morning after Sybil's ever-memorable serenade, Albert Linwood made his appearance at Mr. Clayton's at an early hour, and Sybil, frightened by what Isabel had told her, and thinking that a manner as cordial as hers had been, might give him encouragement, was silent, almost coldly so, during his visit. She politely, though in measured words, thanked him for the pleasure that she had enjoyed, and then relapsed into that calm indifferent state which almost maddened Albert, and discovered to him how fervently he loved her, and how much he prized her smiles. Then Sybil seeing the anguish depicted in his face, felt that she had been premature in treating him as if he had already declared himself, and in the effort to regain her former state of playful confidence, raised Albert's hopes once more, until a few whispered words of tenderness from him chilled her again into coldness. And again when he had taken leave of Isabel and approached Sybil, holding out his hand as usual for a parting pressure, she drew herself up almost haughtily, and appearing not to notice his outstretched hand, passed from the room.

Poor Sybil was a mystery to herself, she knew that Linwood must feel that her manner was cruelly capricious, she longed to fly away from the problem which distracted her, which was to find out *just how to conduct herself towards Albert*—but that was not possible, her visit to Isabel was not over, and she felt with a troubled heart that while endeavoring to act aright, she met with a signal failure.

After a few days of this trying state of things, like a river which has gradually swollen and at last impetuously overflowed its banks, Albert Linwood rushed madly

upon his fate. He felt that he must know his destiny, he felt that anything was better than those sudden reactions from joy to despair and from despair back again to joy ; the better part of his nature was wearing away under the suffering which he endured, and like one who has staked his all upon a single issue, he told her of his love.

Sybil Gray was not surprised at his declaration, nor did she feign ignorance of his sentiment ; she had expected it, and she thought that all that remained for her to do, was to place her hand calmly in his with sisterly kindness and tell him that she would be his friend, simply his friend, until life's history was over ; but passionately he arrested those cold measured utterances and stormed the citadel of her heart with protestations of his eternal constancy. He would wait patiently until she had learned to love him, he would be content even to love her without a return if she would promise to be his, trusting to his devotion to win her affections at last ; he would do all, be all for her sake ; if she required it he would relinquish his favorite occupation and live only in her presence ready to come and go at her bidding, he simply desired her not to say that word which would sever them for ever.

And to the utterance of this mighty love Sybil listened sadly ; it was a love which would have satisfied many a lonely yearning heart, but not Sybil's. There was still something wanting after all eloquence had been exhausted in its cause.

Some men, too proud for pleading, would have been satisfied that the averted and emphatic, "I must not, cannot listen to you, I can give you no hope," were what

they really expressed, explicit denial, but to Albert, pride, where the winning of Sybil was concerned, was a forgotten thing; he loved madly, he pursued madly, he would hope on until death or her marriage with another came between him and his one object in life.

Sometimes such love is rewarded, sometimes patience and prayer bring to pass our wildest, most unreasonable desires, and in the meantime Linwood lived on hope.

Isabel was an unwearied watcher in all that appertained to Sybil, and certainly was not idle in acting. She played her part systematically and well, seeing with her quick intelligent eyes something of the real state of things, and at last winning from Albert by her interest and sympathy his entire confidence. After every conference with her, he left her more cheerful, for she always gave him the hope that all would eventually be as he desired, and that such constancy and love would win its reward at last.

But there was another who looked with stronger interest than Isabel upon the result, and it was after a long interview with her that Isabel wrote and despatched the following note to her brother:

"How forlorn and lonely you must be, dear Richard, in your now deserted home, how in need of some cheering words! My hand can be stayed no longer from writing to you and giving you some general intelligence as to how we progress in this gay, busy, bustling world of ours. First, I must write of Sybil. She is enjoying herself as you must have anticipated, for how could such a happy hopeful nature as hers be pining and unsatisfied when we have laid ourselves out to plan pleasures and inventions for her enjoyment. I am proud of being the guardian of one so beautiful and admired as she is, nor am I less proud of the impression that she has made in society, and we all, as well as herself, unite in pleading with you for another month of ab-

sence for her. You will not be astonished when you think of her attractions, that I have a little secret to tell you concerning the dear child. It is this, that she has discarded, though against my will and advice, the best match in the city, a man altogether worthy of her, and one whom you yourself would have approved. She will tell you her reasons, I suppose, herself, as it is rather a difficult matter to treat of here.

"My next subject must be your friend Albert Linwood. He mentioned to me that he had written to you the day he returned, advising you of his arrival, with a promise of a speedy visit to Vernon Grove. This, for the present, is indefinitely postponed—why, you will learn farther on. I must premise by saying that Linwood has great attractions, is independent, handsome, and agreeable, with his European graces still lingering about him, and the charm of Italy in his eyes. We always welcome him gladly, first for your sake, and next for his own intrinsic merit. Now here is the reason why he has not hastened to see you. No sooner did he land upon his native shores than he became enamored of a charming young girl here, who it is thought smiles upon him in return, and he is so much in love that he cannot spare one moment from her side to visit you; *that* will come in time, however, when his fate is decided. All he wants from you now is the sanction of your friendship to his love, and God speed to his heart's first wish, which I have no doubt you will give, and some day not far in the future, he hopes to introduce his bride to you.

"You may like to hear something of your old friend Florence Percy. It seems to me, and all, that her whole nature is changed; she is very beautiful in her quiet demeanor, for you must know that she has taken a dislike to society and lives in a very retired manner, and I am sure by many expressions that fall from her lips that she is pining to be once more in the country.

"Write through your amanuensis a few words to your loving  
"ISABEL."

Vernon received the above epistle just in time to save him from a very melancholy fit of reverie, for each day the absence of Sybil was becoming less bearable. His dark sunless world seemed more gloomy than ever, and

his old impatient mood was fast gaining an ascendancy over him. But now that he was assured that she was well and happy, now that he had heard of her, and the dead blank of silence was broken, he felt more resigned, even though he knew that another month was to be added to her stay: other feelings influenced him too, which will be touched upon hereafter. His reply to Isabel's letter was as follows:

"I have received your letter, dear Isabel, and feel grateful to you for the kindness which dictated your sending it to me. Anything which tells me of your welfare and Sybil's is welcome; keep her another month by all means if she desires it, but do not let your fascinations, or those of any one else, steal her heart entirely away from Vernon Grove.


"As for Albert, God be thanked that he is at home again in safety. And so he wants my sympathy in a new cause—it is early to ask it, he has but so recently returned; he must literally have *fallen*, as a bird falls into a snare, into love. I really thought that he was proof to all charms and spells but those of his beloved art. Nevertheless, though I am a little jealous, ranking myself as I have always done second in his affections, tell him that I congratulate him with my whole heart on the happy life which has opened upon him—I say *happy*, because I know that he could never choose one unworthy of him, and that I do indeed bid him God speed. Nay more, say to her whom he would win, that no truer heart beats under heaven than his, and that one who is a brother to him in all things save blood, would with his most earnest counsel, nay with his last breath, if it were required, entreat her to reject him not.

"Say to Sybil, that in her grandmother there is no change; my daily visit is paid to her as a mere form, for she does not recognize me at all; repeat to her if any change should occur it shall be immediately made known to her."

These, with a few added words relating to Sybil, asking Isabel to spare no expense to gratify her tastes,

and to see that her wants were all supplied, were what Vernon's letter contained. The reception of it threw Isabel into an ecstasy of delight, and long and earnest was the conference of the friends upon the day of its arrival; it was read, and re-read, and commented upon, and finally they concluded that fate must be leagued to assist them, so admirably did their plot progress.

Sybil had obtained a promise from Albert to be silent upon the subject of his love, as it seemed to her impossible that the time would ever come when she could respond to it, but though he resolutely kept his word, even the most indifferent spectator would have detected his admiration of her in his looks and acts. Not that they were obtrusive or annoying to her, for never was love more delicately expressed than in his deferential manner, and even Sybil was touched with his devotion. If such a thing could be, she *almost* loved him, and often wondered what prevented her returning his generous affection, for she acknowledged to herself that he was one who was eminently calculated to win the heart of the most fastidious of her sex, as much by his intellect as by the gifts which nature had bestowed upon him in many ways; still she felt in her heart of hearts that *he* was not the magician who with his wand could lead her by his will, and she trembled for fear that the pity which is "akin to love" might conquer at last, and that an encouraging word on her part giving him some thread of hope might lead him to expect, eventually, to gain more of her favor. The time allotted to her visit had expired, and she looked confidently to her departure as a deliverance from her embarrassing situation; she had fixed upon a day of return, and was making all



her preparations relative to it when Vernon's letter came.

Isabel watched her opportunity and took the most favorable time for acquainting Sybil with its contents. The occasion she chose was just after Linwood had brought to Sybil an exquisite plant, which he had been at some pains to procure, bearing it away from numerous other applicants, and she knew by her voice, which at once chid his extravagance, and the gratified smile that played over her face, that her heart was touched and softened by this new act of devotion.

Sybil had retired to her own room for the night, bearing in her hands the precious exotic, and had placed it upon a stand, and was seated before it inhaling its delicious perfume and examining anew the extraordinary richness of its coloring, when Isabel entered and told her that she had just received a letter from her brother. Sybil's hand was extended to receive it, but Isabel told her playfully that brothers and sisters were supposed to have some secrets, and that although she could not part with the letter, she would gratify Sybil's natural desire to hear from Vernon Grove by reading her some portions of it.

Then she read the part about her grandmother's health, and gravely added, in language like Vernon's, a desire of his that she should remain a month longer, as it was best for several reasons, and at last turned to that part which concerned Albert; here she unfalteringly proceeded in Vernon's exact words, from the joy which his arrival had given, on to his commendation of his friend, and lastly the charge to her whom he loved, artfully giving Sybil to understand that Vernon knew that



it was she, knew that Albert had chosen her from all others, and that nothing would gratify her guardian so much as that she should be his wife.

A long silence followed Isabel's words, which fell deeper into her auditor's heart than even the former was aware.

"And so he wishes it, he advises it?" she said at last sadly, "he is tired of his little Sybil and would give her away to another."

"That it is the first wish of his heart you cannot doubt," said Isabel.

"The first wish of Mr. Vernon's heart!"

A sigh which was almost like a groan followed the echo of Isabel's words.

"Yes," answered Isabel, taking her hand and encircling her with her arm, "I mean that your welfare is Richard's chief aim in life, for he feels to you as a brother, nay, almost as a father who desires to secure the happiness of his child. Look back upon the past and consider what he has been to you; you owe him almost everything, he has petted you, watched over you, and often sacrificed his pleasures for yours, and even your slightest wish has been as a command to *him*."

"I need no reminder of his unvarying kindness," answered Sybil, suddenly overcome with tears.

"Then," continued Isabel, seeing the impression that her words made, "remember that it is no sacrifice he wishes you to incur; no terrible self-abnegation; he simply wants you to accept a fate which would bring joy to his heart and happiness to that of his best friend, a man who has everything to recommend him, position, wealth, which he has gained by his own talents and industry, beauty of person, gentleness and manliness.

Oh, Sybil, pause before you say another word, which might condemn the one to disappointment, the other to a life-long misery and exile from home."

"What do you mean?" asked Sybil, suddenly raising her tearful eyes and flushed face to Isabel's.

"I mean," she answered, "that Albert Linwood is reduced almost to despair; the love which he has for you is more intense, more deeply rooted in his nature than the love which is common among men. I have but a while ago left him, and he tells me that he cannot endure this continued struggle, and that it must end in his avoiding your presence, not that he complained that it was your fault that you were not able to love him, but he only in broken voice deplored his fate, and said that as soon as he had seen Vernon, he would go as quickly as possible back to Europe, never to return here again."

"And of course *I* shall be the cause," answered Sybil bitterly, "of separating two friends whose affection for each other is almost fabulous in its intensity. *I* shall be the one to deprive Mr. Vernon of the almost only comfort of his darkened existence; because it is *my* fiat, Mr. Linwood will desert his friend!"

"Such will be the case," answered Isabel gravely, "but at the same time you must remember that you cannot help it; you will only be the innocent cause of the separation; but oh, Sybil, if by any possible casuistry to yourself you could overcome this strange repugnance, if you could reason yourself into loving Albert Linwood, do it, or if you will, only promise to be his, trusting that a holy love will be the result of a union so well assorted. It would be a ray of light in Richard's dark path, it would somewhat repay him"—

"Hush," said Sybil in an excited tone, "you need not remind me of that again, it is too deeply graven on my heart."

Isabel tried to calm her by words of affection, but her syllables seemed to fall on deaf ears, and she paced the room to and fro, and muttered to herself as if really trying to reason herself into obedience.

"You will weary yourself," said Isabel at last, trying to detain her in her hurried walk, "be seated, and let us talk the matter over calmly."

"*Calmly! Is it a subject for calmness? Use no false terms if you please, Mrs. Clayton; let us look at the thing as it is. Ah, it is the darkest night and hour that ever came to my poor storm-tossed soul! Be *you* seated; touch me not; speak not; move not; only for five minutes let me see what port is nearest—what safest for a shipwrecked life.*"

Mrs. Clayton obeyed these strange passionate words of Sybil's like a feeble child, frightened at her mood, but still feeling that hers was not the power to quell that nervous excitement. Suddenly she stopped before Isabel, clasped her hands to her wildly-beating heart, as if to end its quick pulsations before she spoke, and then, deliberately and calmly, and with nothing but a slight quivering of her lip to show that any emotion lay beneath her freezing words, she addressed her companion:

"Is Mr. Linwood still below? You left him there, you say; is it possible that he may not yet have gone?"

"He is still with Mr. Clayton," answered Isabel; "he said that he would not leave immediately, thinking that you might return to say good night."

"Then go to him and tell him that I cannot come down again to-night ; tell him, too, not to think of going to Europe, so far from Mr. Vernon's presence, because I promise to do as he wishes and to be his wife."

Motionless she stood, almost too still for life ; more like death was her fixed and stony gaze.

"Are you sure ?" began Isabel, almost doubting the evidence of her senses at hearing this plain and clear avowal.

"Ah, yes, I *am sure*," interrupted Sybil, in the same strange tone, and as if wearied with the interview. Then she gently led Isabel from the room as if to prevent further words.

"I will return, dearest, to tell you what effect this rapturous intelligence has upon Albert—whether he keeps his senses or falls into madness from pure joy."

"No, that you must not do ; I do not doubt your wonderful powers either of persuasion or description, but I would be alone this night."

Isabel had gained quite enough, almost more than she had calculated upon. She heard Sybil close the door and lock it, and then with a bounding step and a face as radiant as the morning, she went with the glad tidings to Albert.

Poor Sybil ; the perfume of the brilliant exotic sickened her ; the weight of the whole world seemed crushing her—the room was reeling—her strength forsook her—and she fell fainting upon her couch ; but ere her consciousness quite departed, mad words of anguish burst from her lips ;—they were few, but they told all.

"Oh, my God, it is over ; the sacrifice is completed, and *he* is repaid."

Is there no experience similar to this? Has no pillow on the first night of a betrothal been wet tears? Are there no forced or interested marriages which crush young hearts to the very earth? Are no hours following a plighted troth, where, instead of happy dreams, groans and sobs have arisen in the silent midnight? Ah, yes, many a one whom circumstances have pressed into a marriage without love, tell you that such things are.

And yet it was Sybil's own voluntary act; *so is martyr's choice to be broken upon the wheel.*

## CHAPTER XXI.

### COME AND GONE.

"Within those words how deep a meaning lies—

A ray of light, a gloom ;

A ray as bright as summer evening skies,

A darkness like the tomb.

Yes, thou didst come like beam of evening star,

That, gleaming on the night,

One moment sent its treasured ray afar,

And then was lost to sight.

Couldst thou not stay to glad our home a while,

Our home so reft and lone,

To light our pathway with thy tender smile,

To cheer us with thy tone ?

No ; by the truth that so bereaves my heart,

The sorrow deeply shown,

I feel that we have only met to part,

That thou hast *Come and Gone*."

CAROLINE HOWARD.

It would be almost a vain attempt to describe Vernon's calm happiness when, upon reflection, he mused upon Isabel's letter. A new impulse to live and be happy, spite of his blindness, was given him. He thought first of Sybil's rejection of one who, as Isabel had written, was in every way worthy of her, and it left him a hope that she might, unspoiled by the fascinations of a city life, be content to return to his more quiet home, and he

revolved new plans in his mind to render that home more attractive to her than it had ever been. He sent for fresh luxuries and choice pictures; he had a garden laid out which he called Sybil's, and into which nothing but the rarest plants were to find entrance; and as it was Sybil's delight daily to arrange tasteful bouquets in every available nook and corner in the house, he ordered a variety of vases to be purchased, of antique forms and exquisite designs, blending poetry and sculpture, so that she might take renewed pleasure in her favorite occupation.

He even personally gave orders for a thorough remodelling of Sybil's own apartment, decorating it with a carpet which was more like an exquisite painting than a combination of woollen colors, while her pretty furniture was replaced by another set of a unique and elegant design, in which, as in all that was the result of Vernon's taste and judgment, might be traced an idea of the beautiful rather than the showy. Nor was the smallest particular neglected in the new arrangement; and now that he knew the shade of Sybil's complexion from Isabel's description, and that her hair was blonde and her eyes of the tenderest blue, he exchanged the hangings in her apartment for other drapery, so that it might lend to the beauty of the fair occupant its harmonizing and subduing tone. Then he reserved a place for the books which she loved, and further ornamented the room with exquisite and costly articles of *vertu*.

These seemingly unimportant details interested him more than he might have been willing to confess, but they were for *her*, to give her pleasure, and this was excuse enough to himself. Then when all was completed,

and the old housekeeper had declared her approbation of the change, and had wondered what Sybil would do and say when she should first enter that enchanting chamber, he, too, grew restlessly curious to know what her first impressions would be, and he was more impatient for her return than ever. And yet somewhat resigned had he become to her absence, for a definite time was fixed upon for its duration, and before long he knew he should stand in her very presence and be contented once more, and counting the hours and minutes seemed to take away from them half their length.

Then another object of pleasing contemplation to him was the idea of meeting Albert Linwood ; of taking that true honest hand once more within his own ; of hearing his voice ; of knowing that he was near him once more after so many years of absence, in which everything had changed but their love for each other. What a bright picture the blind man painted in his mind—Sybil at home again, cultivating her flowers, singing, or learning some new lesson from his lips, while seated as of yore at his feet, happy in his praise, yet grateful for his chiding if she in the smallest particular deserved it ; Albert seated with them, his conversation a rich treat as he discoursed upon what he had seen in that far journey, and his character doubly interesting, now that he had added to his other experiences the ennobling passion of a worthy love ; and Vernon himself, blind it is true to Sybil's loveliness and Albert's face radiant with happiness, but still contented at last under his terrible and irremediable affliction.

It was the first really healthy view that Vernon had taken of his own troubles. He raised his head once



more from the drooping posture which it was beginning to assume, with something like the hope of his old life in his face and form; snatches of gay song, memories of sweet passages of poetry burst from his lips; he had turned over a new leaf in the book of existence; the very air which he breathed was more buoyant and welcome to him; he seemed to feel that the sunshine came in at the door where Sybil used to sit and listen to his songs, not as it had come in her absence, in a long line of unmeaning yellow light, but with glowing dancing rays, and he loved to draw his chair to the spot where she had passed so many of her twilight hours ere he knew the value of her whom he was entertaining unawares, and to feel their warming and cheering influence, and imagine that each ripple of gold as it reached him brought a special message telling of her return.

But the sunlight was unchanged, the earth and the air alike the same; the only alteration was the happy one in his own happy heart; but we, who have the privilege of looking into other hearts, know too well how ill-founded this security of content was, and how the beautiful picture that Vernon had painted was sketched only upon the shadowy and evanescent clouds.

We left Sybil crushed and alone, and Isabel speeding upon her mission of joy. It was enough for Albert to know that she had been won without asking how and why. He was quite satisfied with the garbled ingenious statement which Isabel made. Love such as his never reasons. Like one intoxicated with happiness he called Isabel his good angel, and besought her to ask Sybil but for one moment to return to him, so that he might by a single word or look express his gratitude, but she was

inexorable, knowing full well that Sybil could not just yet have borne his presence, nor did she wish to subject her to it, remembering the mood in which she had left her, and that the cord drawn too tightly might snap if but touched with a feather's weight. Therefore she silenced Albert's eloquence by bidding him good night and wishing him pleasant dreams, while he, smiling incredulously at the thought of his losing that blessed state of happiness in unconscious slumber, he, who would not be able to sleep for joy, departed with a promise of an early visit on the morrow.

After a brief unconsciousness, Sybil awoke to life and its miseries and the new part which now devolved upon her to play. She longed for sleep, and it came to her like a gentle mother with a soothing melody for the weary child, and calmed the fever in her frame and the wild throbbing in her head;—her last free sleep she seemed to feel that it was, for on the morrow Albert would have a right to know her very dreams.

She arose early the next day, and seeking Isabel, expressed her desire to return to Vernon Grove. Vernon would scarcely expect her to avail herself of his kindness to remain away another month; it was but right and proper, she said, under the new relations in which she found herself, to go at once and acquaint him that she had done his bidding to the utmost; she knew of no other reason why he should have wished her to stay except that she might return as Mr. Linwood's affianced wife, and as the "first wish of his heart" was granted, she presumed that she might now return.

Sybil spoke bitterly and with a crushed and broken spirit, but Isabel was not moved; there was something

yet to be done, the drama was as yet incomplete, nor must the curtain fall before she had performed her part and won the applause and gratitude of Florence. It did not suit her to have Sybil leave her just yet, and she reminded her of her promise, so willingly granted, to remain another month; and when Sybil said, in a strange tone of voice, that promises ought not to be held sacred with one so vile as she, one who had forgotten what it was to be true, Isabel told her decidedly that it was not convenient for her to return at present, making some trivial and yet plausible excuse about the carriage which was to take her back to Vernon Grove.

Thus even the change and excitement of the journey were denied Sybil; she was completely wretched, and looked in vain for that approving inward sense of right which she knew followed the pursuance of duty. She longed for the solitude of the woods where she had ever carried her childish troubles and had found sympathy amid their shades; she longed for the tones of Vernon's voice, as well as for his written words which Isabel had told her of, to say that she had done as he desired. She felt the need of applause as much as an actress who has strained every nerve to perform her assumed character, and thought, mistakenly perhaps, that could he only appear to her then and there, and say to her, as he had often done when she had performed tasks which she thought difficult once, but oh, how easy now—"Sybil, child, you have done well," that the tangled way would seem clearer to her weary footsteps.

Twice she sat down to write to Vernon, but that terrible third person, who was so necessary to him, would know all, and so it was denied her to tell him

that she had obeyed him like a faithful child to the last.

Then her mood changed, and from that nervous and feverish state she settled into apathy and was indifferent to all around. If Isabel spoke to her and counselled her to wear a brighter face for Albert, whom she expected momentarily, she simply said that it was impossible, that Vernon had not advised her as regarded the expression which she must assume, and that otherwise she had fulfilled his commands to the very letter; and so, like one wrought up to undergo any amount of mental suffering, she awaited Albert's coming.

It was only the old story over again, a hand without a heart,—and who so blind as he who loves? Calmly she listened to his rapturous words; patiently she received those caresses of his which raised him to undreamed of happiness; silently she heard his plans for the future in which she now formed the prominent part. For her to say that she loved him, he yet neither asked nor required, and this delicacy on his part so touched Sybil that she made a resolution, asking Heaven's aid, to try with every effort in her power to return his affection, but until that time came she was glad to feel that he asked for no passionate declarations of love on her part, but was content to sit holding her hand and gazing in her eyes, satisfied that she was his own. It was in such hours as these that all the secrets of his noble heart became hers; he told her of his faults, his aspirations; he exhibited to her his deeply religious nature and his dependence upon a higher power for all the blessings of life while he bent resignedly beneath its discipline. He dwelt long and ardently upon his love for the occupation

which he had chosen and which kept him always so fully alive to what was beautiful in art and nature ; and one day he brought her the picture that had led him to fame, his Inspiration, which he had promised as a gift to Vernon, and he told her, now that she whom it so resembled was all his own, he was content to yield it up to another. Then he dwelt eloquently upon the coincidence of this his ideal of all that was lovely being so much like her ; heaven had guided his hand, he said, as heaven had guided his heart.

But at last Sybil's strength was overtaken. It was one evening when the chilly winds of winter came, and the rustling of the withered leaves, reminding her of the forest winds and leaves of Vernon Grove. Unmindful of the cold, she had sought that marble sylvan temple where, not many weeks before, she had breathed so freely and happily, and in its shelter she hoped to find the solitude which she so much needed. Everything told of a wintry frost, and though careful hands had been busied to preserve the beauty of the gardens, they could not prevent the unceasing fall of the dry dead leaves, nor make the sluggish fountain flow, nor give an appearance of warmth to the chill glistening marble.

Sybil sat down and bowed her head in her hands with such a spirit of loneliness, such a desolate sense of homesickness, that she felt as if her young heart *must* break.

It was here and thus that Albert found her, and drawing her hands from her face he chid her gently for seeking the cold outer air instead of the glowing flame within the house. But the only answer that Sybil vouchsafed was a passionate flow of tears.

"Are you not happy, dearest?" he asked anxiously:

"am I not worthy of you? do you need a more devoted love than mine?"

Sybil still wept wildly, and Albert drawing her head upon his bosom pillowed it there, and awaited anxiously for some word of explanation from her whose single tear was a source of anxiety to him. It was the place above all others where, if she needed comfort and if she had loved him, she would have found it, but raising herself and rejecting the proffered resting-place, she looked with tearful eyes into his and spoke.

"I confess it," she said "I do *not* feel happy, and it must seem to you ungrateful to hear me say it, but I cannot help it. I have given you my esteem and respect and you said that you would wait patiently for my love to come. Your devotion should have touched my cold hard heart and melted it ere this, but I suppose that the time will come, yes, *it must*, when I can repay you better for your love than I do at this moment; but, oh, Albert, just now, just for a little while, look upon me as a poor weak child and treat me like one, and let me go back at once into the country. I know not why I am thus dispirited and so unlike my former self, unless it be that I have led this artificial city life too long, and it seems to me that a purer air and the free, free woods in which I was born would restore me to something of my native cheerfulness. Here I know that I shall distress you by this weary listless spirit, here," she added, with sudden energy, "*I feel that I must die.*"

Why did he not see it all before? he asked himself, why did he not read her thoughts and discover how little the sweet wood violet could flourish out of its own pure atmosphere. He hastened to Isabel and urged her to

send Sybil back to Vernon Grove at once, and the former no longer objecting to her going, acceded to his proposition, naming the day and hour for Sybil's departure. It was not quite as early as Albert could have wished, for she still wanted time. She no longer raised obstacles to the leave-taking, because now she would go as Linwood's affianced wife, but some preliminary steps were to be taken. She must write to Vernon and let him know of Sybil's return and under what circumstances;—this was a delicate task, but her ingenuity soon found a ready way to accomplish it. Fortunately for the development of her plans, she had told Albert and Sybil that she would herself write and acquaint Vernon of their engagement, and she congratulated herself upon waiting until the precise and most auspicious moment had arrived.

When Albert left her, she sat down and penned a few hurried words to Vernon, duly approved of by Florence, and with which she herself was satisfied as a master-stroke of policy, and though she knew that the shock must be a great one to her brother when the intelligence first reached him, still it must exonerate her from all blame in his estimation. Those hurried lines were the following :

“DEAR RICHARD :

“ Who can foretell the future ? Albert Linwood has selected a bride, as I forewarned you, but you will be astonished to hear that his affianced is Sybil Gray, astonished and delighted both, for she is the child of your adoption and he the brother of your love. You must expect to see Sybil in the early part of next week ; Albert will follow her a day or two after her departure, when you can judge for yourself how certain it is, that with their congenial ages, tastes, and dispositions, they will be happy in their united lives.

“ As ever, your loving

ISABEL.”

It was well that Vernon's servant, who read this abrupt epistle, not in the least suspecting the agony it inflicted, immediately left the room to give notice that Miss Gray was soon expected back, an event which caused the whole household, as well as himself, who had now risen by his devotion to Vernon's interest into a humble friend, great rejoicing, for Sybil was beloved by all.

It was well that in his presence Vernon had command over himself, for no sooner had he departed than his old enemy, unrestrained passion, burst forth ; he felt struck as with lightning, not dead, that would have been best, he thought, but scathed as with liquid fire ; the bitterest curses issued from his lips, and he hurled upon the head of the child whom he had loved so tenderly and upon the friend whom he had cherished, maledictions deep and strong.

His life all lonely, his hopes all blasted, wronged as he deemed it by his friend, forsaken by Sybil, he was reckless.

Suddenly seizing a pen which he knew lay upon the table, and with which he had often employed himself in forming characters since his blindness, he wrote a few words to Sybil and folded the letter, then calling John, he bade him direct, seal, and forward it without delay, feeling a fierce satisfaction in what he had done, and yet succeeding well in preserving an outward calm before his servant.

Sybil was luckily alone when she received the letter. At first she did not understand its cruel meaning, and then when she spelled out the strange words, and their significance broke upon her with its full force, she would have fainted had she not felt that she had need of all her self-possession, for a battle was before her which she would



be obliged to fight alone, knowing that what such a man as Vernon had written she must abide by then and for ever.

The few terrible words ran thus—they were scarcely legible, but too truly were they written there—

“Sybil, *the blind* can write under some circumstances, and a few lines will convey to you what I design to say. Your aunt Mary, no doubt, will receive you, for this cannot be a home to you again; you must come to Vernon Grove *never more*.

“RICHARD VERNON.”

If she had known what she had done to provoke his anger, if he had only enlightened her as to the extent of her delinquency, she could have borne better that dreadful mandate of banishment even though she had been accused wrongfully, but he had shut the door to everything like an explanation and only time would reveal to him the wrong that he had inflicted upon her. But perhaps she deserved it, she thought. Then at this suggestion, with a scrutiny which gave herself no mercy and spared not her slightest fault, she examined her words and acts for the past two months, and still she could find nothing very blamable in her conduct, not even any inconsistencies too flagrant for forgiveness on his part.

To Vernon's sister she felt that she must not complain; what right had *she* to intrude herself upon Isabel's home and protection, when her brother had discarded her as too unworthy to find a shelter beneath his roof! No, some other plan must be thought of.

Next, the idea occurred to her of writing to Vernon and humbly asking where her offence lay, and desiring pardon for any omission or commission on her part, but his

having written himself, seemed to be proof conclusive that he did not wish another to share the mystery, whatever it was, and she did not dwell long upon that thought because of its impracticability. She must act as though Richard Vernon who had so often laid his hand upon her head and promised her protection through the storms of life, were dead to her, or had thrust her from his world.

Then to have asked consolation or sympathy from Albert, feeling as thus towards him, she could not, would not; so turn where she would, like a poor wounded hare pressed hard on all sides by its pursuers, she stood stationary for an instant with a glare almost of insanity in her eyes, looking around to see if there was no way of escape, through tangled wood, or fern, or deep waters, or burning fields. Had she paused long in that unprofitable survey it would literally have maddened her, and so at once seeking Isabel she told her as calmly as she could that she would avail herself of her kindness, and instead of going to the Grove, she would pay a visit to her aunt, whom she had not seen since her early childhood. Isabel thinking this arrangement natural enough, and supposing that Vernon would send for her there, readily acceded to Sybil's wishes, and little deemed that under that calm cold exterior a human heart was bleeding.


Then came the parting with all who had been kind to the gentle girl. Her consideration always won the love and respect of domestics, and as they gathered round it was a sad trial to her to hear their words of sorrow at the thought of losing her, or some chance allusion to Linwood, for their relation to each other was generally known, and though couched in respectful terms, the

simple wish of a long and happy life and a pleasant journey with her chosen companion to the end, failed to bring the smile which they tried to call to her lips.

Next followed her farewell to Clayton ; if he could have loved anything but his wife and the constant accumulation of gain, he must have loved Sybil, for she had left the impress of her pure and beautiful spirit upon his household, but his heart was hardened to anything like affection beyond his contracted sphere, and a hurried "good-by" was all that he vouchsafed her. Afterwards she turned to Isabel, looking to her, at least, who had taken such an interest in her fate, for some deep emotion now that she was about to leave her, but she, feeling somewhat conscience-stricken at the sight of that pale suffering face, affected an air of levity which served to deaden her self-reproach and Sybil turned away from her heartless adieu to meet what she most dreaded, Florence's scornful bearing. Delicacy might have kept her away, knowing that Sybil could feel no affection for one who scarcely made a secret of one day hoping to take her place at Vernon Grove ; but curiosity prevailed, she wanted to see the last of her rival who was now so surely removed from her path.

She was more regal than ever, Sybil thought, and that queen-like bearing became her well ; her lips were blandly smiling, but her eyes were gleaming with a cruel light, an assumption of power, which lit up her face with a wondrous beauty.

Sybil extended her hand and looked deprecatingly towards her as though silently asking her not to kill one so crushed already, with a word of unkindness, but Florence, in the height of her pride and consciousness



of success, like a tiger watching her prey, still kept her basilisk eyes fastened upon her and heeded not her beseeching glance.

"I suppose," she said, touching Sybil's hand with the tips of her long slender fingers, "that when we pay another visit to Vernon Grove, *as we intend to*, Mr. Linwood will have claimed you as his bride, and Mr. Vernon will be our sole entertainer. We shall miss the little songstress, who entertained us, and should we go upon an expedition to the Cave, we shall feel sadly in want of some one to get up an exciting scene."

"Would to God I had died in that gloomy cavern," thought Sybil, but she only murmured some commonplace words in reply, and passed out to the carriage where Albert was waiting to arrange her furs comfortably, and to utter some low tender words at parting, which Sybil scarcely heard or understood.

"Expect me soon dearest," he whispered, "I shall hasten from Vernon Grove as soon as I possibly can after my visit to Richard, and see you at your aunt's, for where you are not, there is no happiness for me."

"Thank you," said Sybil, looking up with a strange almost idiotic smile. She felt called upon to say something, she did not exactly know what, and the carriage moved off with its sad and weary occupant.

It was a long, long drive, and before many miles were passed the rain came down in a steady drizzle, and the cold wind moaned through the branches of the trees.

"Better thus," thought Sybil, "than the gay, happy, mocking sunshine."

The carriage reached the humble cottage door, and Sybil alighted and entered. A staid woman, with placid

face, and her grey hair combed smoothly upon her unwrinkled brow, sat by the fire intently engaged in knitting. So passionless an aspect had she, so mechanical were her movements, so busy was she in her occupation—as though life had no other work for her to do—that a looker-on might have said she had traversed the stormy waves of existence, and had now emerged into a calm open sea, where not even the memory of the past remained to her to disturb the serenity of her look; or, if passions were beneath that calm exterior, or had memory ploughed deep furrows in her soul, she had learned the art of keeping them subjected to her will and out of the sight of others.

She did not hear Sybil's step, nor know of her presence until she felt a hand upon her shoulder, and a most musical voice speaking close to her ear.

"Dear aunt Mary," said she, "I have come to live with you, if you will let me; you remember Sybil, whom you called your pet once, when she was a little child? I am strong, and shall not be much of a burden to you, for I can help you work;—will you let me come?"

The kind-hearted woman arose at once, and gazing a moment intently at Sybil, brushed away a few tears as she saw her brother's features reflected in his child's, then kissing her, she bade her welcome, took off her bonnet, chafed her cold hands until they were warm, threw an additional stick upon the fire, which burned brightly with a cheerful glow, saw that her trunks were carefully placed in the little passage-way, and then sat down with her at the hearth.

It was all humble enough, but it was a *refuge* and a *home*.

"And so those grand proud folks have forsaken you," at last said the placid-faced woman. "'Put not your trust in princes,' says the good book; have they turned you away, Sybil, dear?"

"They have, aunt Mary."

Sybil shivered; the truth had not come home to her so certainly before; here was no glossing over of words—she had been literally turned away—forsaken.

"You are cold, child, draw nearer yet to the fire."

"Oh, no, I am not cold *now*," she answered; "you are so kind and good, and it is so warm and comfortable here; what a pleasant home you have, dear aunt Mary." Sybil felt what she said spite of the stained plastering, rough floor, and rude chair upon which she was seated.

"I wonder that you think so," returned her aunt, just coming as you do from the grand home of a rich man; but you will get here what failed you there—some one to love and cherish you always—some one who will not forsake you until death takes her from you. I always thought that it was a bad plan of your grandmother's to give up her cottage and take you to live at Mr. Vernon's; but what better could we have expected from a soured, unhappy, wicked man?"

"Oh, no, not *that*—not the last," answered Sybil, rising and laying her hand upon her aunt's.

"Well, perhaps I may be mistaken," she said less bitterly, "but he has done you some wrong—has he not, darling—that you come from his downy carpets and silver dishes to this humble shed?"

Sybil leant her head against the low mantel, and gazed dreamily into the fire. "He has only told me never to

come to Vernon Grove again," she said with a tremulous voice.

"Never! that is a hard cruel word, Sybil."

"And yet I loved him, God knows," she said passionately; "I loved him in his helpless blindness as a sister might love a brother. I have been patient with him, and self-denying, scarcely allowing myself needful exercise at times; then I have watched and waited for his faintest word, and fondly deemed that I had won from him a brother's love, until this wretched day, when all is changed. Oh! aunt Mary, you know not what I have lost—such a friend, and such a happy, happy home. If I had been ungrateful, I might have deserved it all; but I have always tried to do what would please him best—and not to know *why* I am banished is the bitterest pang of all."

"Do not weep so wildly, dear Sybil," said her aunt, frightened at the violence of her grief; "if you have lost one home, here is another, humble though it be, where you and your grandmother will ever be welcome."

"I know it—I feel it," was Sybil's answer, "and you must not think me repining or dissatisfied; it is so hard to realize this sudden change—so hard to think what she will do in her helplessness without me, and how Mr. Vernon, proud though he be, will find his way through the tangled woods, to his favorite haunts, without my hand to guide him."

Her kind relative tried, by reasoning and comforting, to still those passionate words of despair; but in the end she let her weep on, until at last, quite new to sorrow such as this, or indeed any sorrow save the terrible ordeal which she had lately passed through in promising

to be Albert Linwood's wife, she accepted, like a poor shipwrecked mariner, any aid that was offered—and half kneeling before the glowing fire, the violence of her grief seemed spent, her tears turned to occasional sobs, and pressing her hands hard over her eyes, she became more quiet. Then the old lady drew the child towards her until Sybil's weary and aching head rested in her lap. Soon Sybil's sobs came less frequently, her breathing was more regular, her limbs relaxed, her hands dropped helplessly from her closed eyes, and she slept for very sorrow.

Her sleep, if *that* it could be called, in which there was no real repose, but a succession of starts, and a quivering of her rich ripe lips like a grieved child's, did not continue long, and she awoke with a frightened look and gazed wildly around.

"I would not think about him any more," said her aunt, now finding it necessary to be decisive; "forget one who has proved so cruel, so false-hearted."

"He is *not* cruel, not false-hearted," she answered quickly; "aunt Mary, if you love me you must take those words back."

"I cannot take them back, and will not, either," returned her aunt, "until you can prove him otherwise, by letting me hear the whole story; sit down, Sybil, and tell me all, so that I may judge between you; for now that he has sent you away from him into another home—discarded you, as I understand you, without a hearing; now that you are mine, and not his, I must hear all."

Sybil seated herself again, gathered up her long, dishe-



velled hair into something like order, clasped her hands together, sighed deeply, and then began her story, while her aunt Mary bent over her knitting-work, and the polished needles clicked in their eternal round.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"How changed since last her sparkling eye  
Glanced gladness round the glittering room,  
Where high-born men were proud to wait,  
Where beauty watched to imitate  
Her gentle voice and lovely mien,—  
And gather from her air and gait  
The graces of its queen."

BYRON.

"So the dreams depart,  
So the shadows flee,  
And the sharp reality  
Now must act its part."

"WELL, aunt Mary," Sybil began, "you know that he is very rich ; you, in your humble home here, can scarcely realize what his wealth is, and how, though he never has beheld, and never will behold all the magnificence at Vernon Grove, his inner spirit craves for whatever is beautiful and refined. You could scarcely understand, unless you knew it and had seen it, why it is that he cannot be happy unless he is surrounded with all that is most attractive in nature and art ; or why, even though blind, he knows just where a picture ought to be hung that the lights may fall upon it properly, or what groups of flowers would make the best display. Even I do not comprehend it fully, though I have known him so long,

unless it be that there is a spirit of beauty, a harmony within him, just as there is in an artist's nature, which calls for a corresponding beauty without."

"*But the story,*" said aunt Mary.

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten! Ever so long ago, when I was quite a little child, I remember his coming to grandmother's cottage, and saying to her in his cold proud way, while he leaned against a sapling near the porch—

"'I have come to ask you to live with me, Mrs. Gordon; you are declining in life, with but few comforts around you, and we may be of use to each other; you with your buoyant spirit which knows so well how to live down trouble and disappointment, can cheer me,—and a home with me will save you much anxiety and labor for the future; come, and the obligation will be mutual; besides, I ought not to be entirely a stranger to my mother's early friend.'

"Grandmother glanced at me and looked troubled; then remembering that he could neither see the glance nor the troubled look, she said:

"'But the child, Mr. Vernon; I promised never to forsake her, and her parents, in another world, will ask her at my hands; and perhaps if I take her to your grand home, her wild untaught ways and my devotion to her might not be exactly what you would like.'

"'Bring the child, Mrs. Gordon,' he interrupted, 'your duties to her shall in no way interfere with what I would require of you.'

"'But,' continued grandmother, 'there are other reasons which make it seem best that I should remain here. There are so many changes with the great and wealthy, that we may have after all to return to our cot-

tage, not so content as when we left it. I have heard, too, of a place where the blind can go to be taught better to enjoy life, and where it becomes quite easy for them to read and write. Still, if these are not objections, there is another thing which would materially alter Sybil's fortunes and mine; this dreary country life, now a novelty to you, will not content you long; you will leave it for other excitements and pleasures, and in your wanderings you would find many a lady of the land who would be glad to place her hand in yours and lead you the world over.'

"Though it is many years ago that he stood there before the cottage door, I shall never forget the lights and shadows of feeling that passed over his face, like the play of summer lightning. It seemed to me that the light was there because grandmother had drawn a pretty picture of a blind man led by a fair white hand and guided on by a tender voice; and shadows, because he knew that at least then, it was not real, and no one waited at home for his return; or perhaps after all it was only the evening sun that brightened his face for a moment ere it disappeared, leaving his naturally gloomy aspect darker than before.

"Mr. Vernon was silent for a moment, and pressed his hand upon his heart as though there was a pain there, and then answered sadly and with something of bitterness in his tone—

"'You need fear neither of the events which you have mentioned; first, because I am past the age when I could regularly apply myself to learn a new language, the language of the blind, and because I should be too impatient to study the minute details of such instruction:

then as for the other contingency, I fear that the ladies of the land, as you call them, would scarcely thank you for the privilege which you are so ready to offer them; true, there might be some who with a Sister of Charity spirit, for pity, might undertake such a task; and I know one, and perhaps others, who would accept the office for the sake of the gold which gilds it and which happens to be the blind man's heritage, but these I want not. As for inspiring pure love, the love which endures all, hopes all, gives all, *that* I can never hope to gain. I have *experience* to tell me this; and my contempt for woman as I have known her, her deceit, her avarice, her worldliness, is too much a part of my nature for me ever to regard her otherwise than I do now. But though this is my view of the ball-room butterflies that I have met, I am afraid that I do some choice spirits that I have not met a grievous wrong, and it is for this very reason that I want your companionship, so that you may lead me to suppress this continual murmuring against men and destiny, and make me look on the bright side of life instead of its darker aspect. It is because I am proud, and suspicious, and wilful by nature, that I want your kind counsel to check me and to help me to be more like yourself,—tried, and yet patient; afflicted, yet humble; lonely, yet not repining; yet why, oh, my God! he exclaimed passionately, 'why is it that I am so stricken down and need this discipline? Why, under such a dispensation, was I not made gentle and forbearing? Life is almost too worthless a thing to care for. A blank or positive torment would be almost preferable.'

"It appeared to me that grandmother, with her calm passive nature, scarcely understood his impulsive words,

so sad and despairing, or the character of him who stood before her as he bared his proud heart and showed its secret sins, for she said something reproachfully about his battling against the decrees of Providence, and his gathering only thorns when he might gather flowers.

“ ‘Flowers!’ he said, while his blind eyes seemed to gaze fruitlessly around, ‘give them to me; tell me where there are any in my path.’

“I could not understand then *all* that he meant, though I do now, and simple child that I was, I took the wreath that I was weaving and stood by his side; then as he had said that he wanted flowers, I held his hand and twined around it my pretty garland.

“‘These are beautiful flowers, Mr. Vernon,’ I said timidly, ‘crimson, and yellow, and blue, and the leaves are the brightest green I could find. It is I who am giving them to you, little Sybil; will you take them and carry them to your home?’

“‘God bless the child!’ he said tenderly, ‘so you bring me flowers, Sybil, pure offering laid by pure heart in the blind man’s path. Will you come and live with me, come and lead me into the sunshine sometimes and let me hear the tones of your child-voice, Sybil?’

“Foolish words I answered in return, but they could not be recalled.

“‘Yes, I will come if grandmother does, for she has often told me that in the great house beyond the hill are birds, and books, and gems, and pictures, and golden broideries fit for a queen. Can we go to-day, or to-morrow, can we go *now*?’ I asked with childish eagerness.

“His hand dropped mine. ‘Alas!’ he said ‘you are

not separate from the rest ; draperies and tinsel, broideries and gold are the uppermost thoughts with one and all of your sex ; nevertheless, Mrs. Gordon, come, and bring the child ; you at least are an exception, and are above being tempted with these.'

"Then he stooped as if to kiss me, but turned his head listlessly away, bade grandmother good-by, and calling his servant, departed slowly through the twilight woods.

"You know that we went; you know that we bade farewell to our sweet cottage home, Mr. Vernon sending for us in his grand coach, and that we exchanged our simple life for his splendid home. You see how I grew from a child to a woman, while he loved me as if I were a sister; at least I thought so until to-day; you have heard how grandmother gradually became imbecile and helpless, and even has ceased to recognize her grandchild, and yet that he provides for her comfort as if she were all in all to him; that he let me be of service to him sometimes, repaying him in a small degree for all the care and expense that he has lavished upon me. Then came his sister's visit with her beautiful friend, who, I sometimes imagine, might have made him think less of my simple rustic ways; but that may be a harsh judgment and I will take it back. Next, my gay careless sojourn at Mr. Clayton's city home, where everything was as bright and beautiful as a dream; and last, Albert Linwood's arrival. He, I must tell you, is Mr. Vernon's best friend,—an artist just from his studies in Europe, and a great favorite with all who are acquainted with him. *He*, aunt," said Sybil blushing, and determined to have no half-way confidences, but to tell the whole truth, "he loved me after he had

known me a little while, but spite of all that his friends said in his favor, I could not return his affection, though his society always gave me pleasure. He was so importunate, so determined to win my love, that one day I told him that it must be a forbidden subject, because the more I thought about it, the more I felt that we could never be nearer than friends. This, I thought, finally decided the matter, when Mrs. Clayton received a letter from Mr. Vernon, counselling, advising, in fact telling me in just so many words, that he would wish me above all things to become Albert's wife; and so pressed hard on all sides, knowing Mr. Vernon's wish, and Albert's worth, subject to Mrs. Clayton's constantly advocating it, I forgot self entirely and promised to be his. Just after I had yielded to the wishes of those around, my life seemed to be one dark dreadful blank, but now that he whom I loved so well has forsaken me, I seem to turn to Albert as a last refuge, trusting in the end that his devotion will make me, if not happy, content; for whom have I now to go to for protection and counsel but you and him?"

Sybil stopped for a moment in her narrative, and seemed lost for awhile in deep thought,—then her face brightened, for in that brief space of reflection she imagined that she had discovered the cause of Vernon's course of conduct.

"There is one other thing, dear aunt Mary," she continued, "which I forgot to tell you, and which may serve to explain this dark mystery which surrounds me. I met at Mrs. Clayton's another person—a man of wealth and position whom I was so unfortunate as to inspire with love, too, but neither could I respond to his any



more than to Albert's mad worship, and so I had to send him away unhappy and disappointed. The idea came to me just now that Mr. Vernon had heard of this, and that he would rather have me marry him than Albert because his wealth and influence are very great; I thought, that provoked because I had refused so brilliant a lot, Mr. Vernon might impulsively have written that dreadful note of banishment. But my judgment is feeble, my brain throbbing, my ideas not clear to-day, dear aunt, and now that you know all, tell me what you think, and so ease my heart of its heavy load of wretchedness."

But no satisfactory judgment could her sympathising friend form, even though Sybil had told her all, and kissing her affectionately, and telling her with the earnest trust which was a part of her life, "to be of good cheer, for there was a silver lining to every cloud," she led her to her little room and bade her good night, promising to consider what she had told her, and perhaps on the morrow she might be able to arrive at something like the truth.

The griefs of girlhood are very often magnified, and sometimes from the lips of youth come passionate exclamations which would seem to betoken utter misery, while longing for death and vague thoughts of seclusion for life, or a journey in disguise to some foreign country, are often a theme of meditation for those who are suffering under imaginary or real slights and ill-treatment. But Sybil was bowed by no imaginary grief. Up to the time of her departure from Vernon Grove, her life had been one pleasant dream, with scarcely a ripple of sorrow to break upon its even tenor; her trials

had not come to her by degrees, but had suddenly enveloped her in gloom; and thus when she was left alone in that unfamiliar chamber, with the drizzling rain beating against the window panes, she felt utterly forsaken;

——“the future stretched before her  
All dark and barren as a rainy sea.”

Even when her thoughts rested upon her aunt, she felt as though she were no real refuge to her, since though strong-minded and patient, tried by sorrow herself, and submissive, her walk in life had been but an humble one, and though it was no fault of hers, Sybil knew that she could not appreciate her nicer feelings or sympathise with the refined education and associations which had been hers since she had found a home with one so fastidious as Vernon.

Had she discovered anything wherewith to reproach herself in that long and lonely vigil, she might have gone to her accuser, and humbling herself before him, have asked his forgiveness, but all was a blank save his letter, the words of which seemed burnt into her heart and brain.

Ah, how weary she was with weeping; her head throbbed wildly, and fever flowed with the blood in her veins. The day had seemed to her longer than any other in her life, because so comfortless and wretched. Poor forsaken Sybil; she sat by her window heedless of the rain and damp air, and looked out into the night to see if a single friendly star was in the heavens to shine upon her with a cheering ray, but in vain did she look for sympathy there, for the night was starless; the fitful waving of the trees and their grotesque grouping

frightened her, while a sudden gust of wind and sleet drove her with unfriendly violence away, and she closed the casement and her heart despairingly, while the last gleam of hope of any external aid, to dull the point of her sharp sorrow, died away.

"It cannot be wicked sometimes to wish to die," she murmured, as she gazed vacantly at the fading embers on the hearth, "if God has appointed *a time* for every one to leave this world of bitterness for another, why could not mine be this hour, this very instant? I would gladly welcome death, if it were not impious to pray for it, and how sweet would be the eternal calm of the grave compared with a life of misery such as mine."

Then she whispered to herself the words of another, which she in her careless happy life of the past had often wondered at, so improbable did it seem that any one should desire to leave this bright beautiful world of sunshine, but now they came home especially to her saddened heart.

"Take me, my mother Earth, to thy cold breast,  
And fold me there in everlasting rest,  
The long day is o'er;  
I'm weary, I would sleep,  
But deep, deep,  
Never to waken more."

Alas! for Sybil! alas! for us all! There are *some* nights when we cannot sleep, when the overstrung nerves refuse to be quieted and the anxious heart will not be still, and the weeper watches drearily on. God save us from many of these frightful vigils,—God keep us from the fierce agony of such sleepless hours!

When such an experience comes to youth, as it did to Sybil, it is unforgotten almost through a life-time. The cold night succeeded by the colder dawn found her still weeping, and watching, and longing for rest,—and through all, came a cry wrung from her young heart, with no answering voice to still it—“*Alas! what have I done?*”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"The death-bed of the just—  
Angels should paint it."

YOUNG'S *Night Thoughts*.

"When some beloved voice that was to you  
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,  
And silence, against which you dare not cry,  
Aches round you like a strong disease and new—  
What hope? What help?"

MRS. BROWNING.

SYBIL'S change of destination determined Albert at once to visit his friend, and feeling in the all-absorbing passion which had now become a part of his existence, that he had neglected one to whom he owed so much, he hastened to Vernon Grove. He longed to impart to him the joy that this new tie in his life occasioned, to thank him for all that he had been to Sybil and all that he had done for her, and to receive his congratulations in person.

He was not so absorbed in himself as to fail to notice the marked improvements which had taken place since he had visited Vernon Grove, how it had entirely changed its character, and from a fine country-seat remarkable only for its beautiful scenery, wild and picturesque in its nature, had become a highly cultivated domain, a fitting home for a man of tastes so refined and cultivated as Vernon's. The soft fresh air of the coun-

try blew gently upon his brow; the brilliant azure of the skies, the quiet, interrupted only by the distant lowing of cattle or the tinkling of the bells of browsing sheep, the sense of perfect peace, all thrilled him as with a magic influence, and touched him as no scene in nature had ever done before; he wondered from whence had come that new life, that better appreciation of what was lovely in the world, that *perfection of existence*, and with a wild heart-throb his lips murmured—"it is *love* and *Sybil*."

His delicious reverie was interrupted by his arrival at the door of the house, but no sooner had he entered, than he perceived by the utter absence of the accustomed ceremony and style which Vernon always maintained, and by the hurrying tread of servants to and fro, that some unusual event was disturbing the usual tranquillity there. This was a true conclusion, for a stranger always unexpected but ever to be looked for was abiding there; the spirit of death was silently and invisibly waiting for its prey, and was hovering over its victim, who, as far as a good life and an earnest longing for a higher state of existence was concerned, was prepared for its inevitable call.

Ever since Sybil's departure, Mrs. Gordon had continued the same, unconscious of the presence of others, and imbecile to perfect childishness, but on the morning of Linwood's arrival a change had taken place, for the better, as regarded health, an unconcerned looker-on might have said, but a return to consciousness, like the bright flicker of a dying lamp, only showed those who were interested in her that her last great change was near, and that the bright intelligence which she evinced

was only an earnest of what her freed spirit would quicken into when it left the feeble body of clay.

Her first act was to call repeatedly for Sybil, and Vernon, remembering his promise to her in case any change should occur to her grandmother, forgot all the events which preceded his sending her into banishment in the presence of the great Master of events, and dispatched his carriage for her at once to Mr. Clayton's, hoping that it would still find Sybil there. All his injustice, his ungenerous course of conduct suddenly became revealed to him, and impatient and restless, trying to soothe the dying woman and yet not knowing how to explain Sybil's absence satisfactorily, his anxiety for a few hours was punishment enough for his fault.

The sound of approaching wheels led him from Mrs. Gordon's room to the entrance door, with a vague hope that Sybil had not obeyed his cruel mandate and had returned to Vernon Grove, but instead of the expected grandchild's arriving to shed peace around her relative's dying bed, Albert entered, and with extended hand and loving voice, greeted his friend. It was no time nor hour for revenge or bitterness, and when Albert, with a tremor of joy in his tone, and a beating heart, began to tell him his tale of happiness, instead of smiting him to the ground as the evil part of his nature suggested, he simply interrupted him by saying that he knew all from Isabel's letter, and wished him every possible happiness, then stating the case of the dying woman, he besought Albert at once to return in the carriage which had conveyed him thither, and to bring Sybil to her grandmother. When Albert informed Vernon that only the day before she had gone to her aunt's, as he thought

depressed and sad, and that the rain had poured in torrents during her lonely drive, Vernon shuddered to think that he had caused her the suffering which she had so plainly exhibited, and hurried Albert off to expedite her return to her old home.

Not long after Sybil's humble noon-day meal, a vehicle drove up to her aunt's door, and Albert Linwood alighted. Sybil knew at once from his sad and subdued expression that he was the bearer of evil tidings, and importuned him to tell her at once if he were the messenger of any ill news, and in obedience to Vernon's injunctions to delay not an instant upon his errand, he acquainted Sybil at once with the truth. No burst of useless anguish overcame her, no wringing of hands and sobs of despair, for in the school of sorrow through which she had so lately passed she had learned something of self-command; but with a terrible sinking of the heart and with trembling hands she made her preparations for departure, blaming herself the while in her silent sorrow for having ever deserted that bed of loneliness and sickness. Only once did Linwood see that calm settled look of despair alter in its stony expression, and this was as she turned to bid her aunt farewell. Throwing herself passionately into her arms, she kissed her lips, her silvered hair, her placid brow, as though she were parting from her only friend, and sobbed out her thanks as she embraced her, while the kind old lady, wiping her own fast flowing tears away, bade her remember that the cottage was now her home, the little attic-room her own, and the white-curtained bed, come weal, come woe, especially reserved for the dear child who had entered like a gleam of sunshine into her lonely home.



Sybil could only look her gratitude for this renewed kindness, but Albert with many eloquent words thanked their generous hostess, and with a glance of pride at Sybil, bade her remember that he had a claim upon her likewise, and that at some future time not far distant, he hoped to reciprocate her hospitality by offering to her a home with them.

The old despairing look came back to Sybil; a sudden shudder seized her upon hearing Linwood's words, and uttering an impatient "come," she sprang into the carriage and they were soon speeding swiftly on their way. Sybil was silent during the ride, tormenting herself with new reproaches and grateful, oh, how grateful, to Vernon for allowing her the privilege of returning to give one look to that beloved face which had watched her from her cradle to womanhood; and yet she almost shrunk from the ordeal which awaited her. She had never seen death, she had read of it only, either as surrounded with horrors or as an event which was a swift and beautiful transition from earth to a higher life, where a corpse was bedecked with flowers or drooping willows hung poetically over a fresh-made grave, but in her conception of it there was nothing real. What she had heard and read seemed to her afar off, like the memory of a dream, but now, here it was close at hand; the rigid form, the icy brow, the stiff unanswering lips, the unyielding fingers, and she sank back in the carriage and covered her eyes as though to shut out from view the image that still pursued her, and which no effort of hers could banish. Albert, after attempting to engage her in conversation in order to turn her thoughts from painful subjects, and failing in his efforts, left her to herself, and Sybil appre-

ciated his delicacy in conjecturing that in an hour like that, words had no comforting power, but he could not refrain from occasionally taking her hand and pressing it tenderly, or whispering a single word of endearment, which she, however, scarcely heard, since there seemed only one bitter thought left her, one overmastering sensation, involved in a little sentence, *the presence of death in the household*.

At last the carriage stopped and she was at home—yes, she thought, spite of all, it was still her home, and the journey to it, that drive which seemed to her to have extended over numberless days, was at last at an end, and the hallowed spot was reached. How her heart yearned towards each familiar object, how even through eyes now fast filling with tears she noted the growth of her favorite plants, the delicate blossoms of the fruit trees which she had left with bare, craggy branches, the fresher look of the rain-brightened verdure. She scarcely availed herself of Albert's proffered assistance, but springing lightly to the ground, hurriedly replied to the servants' words of welcome, rushed by them, passed the long corridor, up the wide flight of steps, and then with noiseless, but swift footsteps, entered that dim and silent room of death.

It needed not her voice in its cry of despair as she knelt by the couch, to tell at least one of the inmates of the apartment of her return, for Vernon had recognized her first foot-fall on the stairs, his heart beating tumultuously as she approached nearer and nearer to his presence.

That absence of two long months was ended! For a moment he forgot that she was another's and remem-

bered her only as his little Sybil whom he had been expecting so long and so fondly, and an impulse to fold her to his heart was too soon dispelled by the memory that she was lost to him for ever.

It was a scene that Sybil never forgot. There lay the dying woman gasping her name, while Vernon leaned over her whispering what words of comfort his lips could frame. Even in the very presence of death she felt a quiet satisfaction in thinking that *they* were at least still bound together by friendship, and that the doom of banishment and estrangement extended not to her.

"Grandmother, look at me," she cried, sinking down upon her knees by the bedside, "forgive me for the wrong that I did in leaving you; ah, you know not what I suffer."

The glazed eyes turned lovingly upon the pleading suppliant, and a smile lit up the pale face lying there which was more potent than many words.

"Could you only be spared a little longer," said the sobbing girl, "I would show you how much I love you, I who left you so desolate and ill."

"*He* has been very kind to me," gasped out the dying woman, pointing to Vernon, who could not withdraw himself from the room, though he felt that perhaps that parting hour should be sacred to the dying woman and her orphan child.

Sybil drew nearer to him and laid her wet cheek upon his hand.

"I knew he would," she said softly, "I trusted you with him because I was sure of his kindness and faithfulness."

An act so full of confidence and words so sweet and

forgiving brought a conscious blush of guilt to Vernon's face.

"*Have* I been kind and faithful to *you*, beloved child," he whispered, bending over her; "have I not rather proved myself faithless and not worth trusting at all?"

"You did not mean to do *that*," she answered, pressing the soft velvet of her cheek still more closely to his hand, "it was a mistake, some one misled you. Ah, there is no home like this; no hand so fit to guide me as this; you will not send me away from you again, dear Mr. Vernon, *promise* me that you will not."

Her gentleness, her sweet call for protection, her dependence upon him, thawed his cold nature, and opened his heart to her once more. He drew her head upon his breast, and it rested there for a brief moment, and could he have seen those eyes bent upon him with an inexpressible tenderness, he would have blamed himself still more for every tear that he had caused her to shed.

"Sybil," he said earnestly, "forgive me for what I have done; the demon of passion maddened me when I wrote those words, and triumphed; that demon which you alone can quell; but I am calmer, better now, and I promise, so help me God, if you can trust to the promises of one so unworthy as I, to keep you here with me as long as you will stay, and not to have one thought of you which does not relate to your welfare, ay, even after Albert himself comes and takes you away."

Sybil started at his closing words, and then crept still closer to him as though he could shield her even then from that dreaded event.

"And will you promise me, too," she asked, "to tell

me some other time than this, what bitter wrong I did you which led you to banish me for ever from your presence?"

"It was no wrong, dear Sybil, or if there were any, it was all on my side. No, I can never disclose to you my reason for that insane act—there are some things in life which must remain secret between man and his Maker, some emotions which only He must behold. There was a struggle, but its nature you must never know—all that can be said of it now, is, that it has passed, and that we, you and I, my precious one, are not to be parted, save with your own consent again."

Sybil drew a long free breath; she was satisfied; and those words exchanged in whispers, at that bed of death, were necessary to make them friends again. Mrs. Gordon seemed to be overcome with stupor during their short dialogue, but suddenly starting up she spoke her last earthly words.

"Sybil, my love, give me your hand, and now, Richard Vernon, yours. I thank you for all your kindness to your dear mother's friend; in that mother's presence I shall soon appear, leaving my orphan child to your care. Promise me, with her hand in yours, that you will be to her henceforth as you have ever been, her father, brother, friend, for she has only you in the wide world."

"Shall I tell her that you have another, Sybil, far dearer, far more worthy than I, to guide you through its perils and trials?"

"Oh, no, no," answered Sybil, burying her face in her hands, "not now, let her die thinking"—

"Thinking what, Sybil? Speak; her breath grows

fainter each moment ; let her depart with what comfort you can give her."

" *That I have but you,*" she answered, "any other knowledge would only disturb her now."

" *So be it,*" said Vernon, grasping her hand more tightly, while a holy joy shone in his face, and upon them as they were clasped, Vernon's hand and Sybil's, Mrs. Gordon laid her own, breathed a blessing on them both and expired.

Vernon placed Sybil, whose strength had now well nigh failed her, in a chair, and calling one of the servants who was awaiting a summons, bade him tell Albert that he was wanted.

"It is all over now, my friend," he said, as Linwood hastened to him, "and Sybil needs your most tender and watchful care, for the blow, though long delayed, has prostrated her even more than I expected. Go in and see her, she had better not be left to herself just now."

Albert entered the room and strove to arouse Sybil from the unnatural and apathetic state in which he found her, but she prayed so earnestly that she might be alone, that in obedience to her wish he led her to her own apartment, and left her to the solitude which she so much desired. Sybil loved her room with an almost childish fondness, its four walls enclosed an atmosphere which breathed of content and quiet joy, how far soever she wandered from it, she felt that her spirit still lingered within it, and her thoughts turned towards it as the Persian worshipper turns his eyes towards the sun. She had built an invisible shrine there whereon were laid her hopes, her aspirations, her prayers from her childhood, and it was with emotions of deep gratitude that she felt

that she was to behold it once more, to take her old accustomed seat by her "landscape window," in her own comfortable yet not luxurious chair, and to lose in forgetfulness, on her own familiar couch, the memory of her trials and sorrows.

But all was changed there ; too bright, too beautiful was it for her crushed and broken spirit, and she scarcely recognized it as her own chamber, where she had spent so many happy hours in the past. One thing, however, seemed familiar to her, that luminous, peace-shedding picture of Evening, whose calming power once interpenetrated her very soul, but before which she now closed her eyes, so intimately did it connect her with the artist who had painted it and to whom she was bound by a chain which galled her daily more and more, and which she felt, if it were not for Vernon's sake, reckless of all that followed, she must sever in twain.

"Not for me," she said to herself, "can be those rich hangings, this soft pliant carpet, these magnificent mirrors, for I was sent away in disgrace, and Mr. Vernon must have fitted up my room for another," and determined to end her suspense, and to check the bewildered state of her mind, she rang the bell, and the housekeeper appeared in answer to her summons. To her kind sympathising glance, and offers of assistance, Sybil replied that she needed her not, except to ask her if she were right in coming to that room, where all was so new and strange, so elegant and tasteful, and if there was another fitted up for her, if she could be shown to it at once, and also if she would tell her when the lady was coming (she thought of Florence and how well it would suit her) who was to occupy that.

"It is for no one but yourself, dear Miss Sybil," answered the woman, "and it is pleasant to think of the praise you give it. I told Mr. Vernon how pleased you would be, and if you are satisfied we are thanked enough for our trouble. It would have done your heart good to see Mr. Vernon toiling and working to have all things in readiness for you; how he came up three or four times a day to ask all sorts of questions, how he had that little worktable moved again and again, until it suited him, and that new picture, which came when you were away, changed from its place time after time, until he was sure, by what I told him, that the light struck upon it in a way that you would like. Then he worried himself more than such matters are worth, to know if the counterpane suited the curtains, and if every speck of dust was brushed from those curious mantel ornaments, and the swinging mirror hung just to suit your height. Ah, Miss Sybil, if you could have seen it all, you would not ask if he meant it for any one else, for no one would be so welcome here as yourself."

Sybil drew a long sigh of relief.

"Thank you, thank you, Mary," she said, "it is indeed beautiful, almost too beautiful, and Mr. Vernon has been very kind. You may go now, and some other time you must come and hear me praise, separately, all your nice arrangements."

Then Sybil prepared for sleep almost calmly; true, her grandmother lay dead in the house, but she had been called to her last long rest, after a life of goodness and usefulness, and since her late years had been so unprofitable to herself, it was her great gain to wake up



upon another life where she was sure of an active participation in the duties of the blessed sphere to which she had been removed. This reflection was certainly most tranquillizing, but her pleasure in the thought that her mind was more serene than it had been for several days, lay in the fact that she was not forsaken by Vernon; on the contrary, that she was the object of his especial care. She was somewhat perplexed by the mystery which she could not solve of those words of banishment which she knew that he had written with his own hand, but what mattered they, since he had recalled her and had so humbly asked her forgiveness!

Sweet was her sleep, sweet her innocent dreams, for even in her unconsciousness she felt that he loved and cared for her still.

After Albert had conducted Sybil to her room, he returned to Vernon, glad of an opportunity to pour out to him his thanks for all his kindness and consideration in allowing him to speak a few words to his betrothed, in fact for all that he had done for them both in a long series of unfailing kindnesses.

"As her protector, yours was the right to yield her up into my care, dear friend," he said, "and while I live I can never forget what you have done for us mutually. You have made her what she is, moulding her character by your watchful care to its present perfection, cultivating her mind until you have rendered her almost your equal in intellect, and helping her to develop those fascinating graces which charm every one who approaches within her sphere. Be assured, dear Vernon, that Sybil and I will ever make your welfare our daily prayer."

Vernon's heart seemed to him to be turned to stone;

he could have said words blasting the man who told him so confidently that he would bear Sybil Gray away from his home and care; he could have uttered curses upon his head, or have struck him dead with a look, but the memory of that little hand which he had clasped within his own so lately, and of that fair innocent head which had been pillowed upon his breast, restrained him, and though he could not answer this burst of gratitude with any gratulatory words, he was at least silent, and that was a gain for his rebellious heart.

Passing on to the solitude of his own apartment, he closed the door and locked it against intrusion, and then throwing himself upon his knees, prayed as *she* had taught him. What words were then addressed to an all-pitying God, man may never know; what agony was his, what temptation, what struggle, what triumph at last; but this we *may* know, that to the grave of his aged friend he went the next day with a changed nature, purified from many of its stains, girded with strong resolves, and bent upon making a final conquest of self. The good seed sown by the patient child who had guided him in his blindness, had sprung up into growth, and the harvest was abundant and blessed.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

" His love is hidden, like the springs  
Which lie in earth's deep heart below,  
And murmur there a thousand things  
Which nought above may hear or know.  
'Tis hid, not buried! Without sound,  
Or light or limit, night and day,  
It (like the dark springs underground),  
Runs, ebbs not, and can ne'er decay."

BARRY CORNWALL.

THE burial was over, the grave had received its own, and still Sybil mourned. Those who watched and were interested in her, could not fathom the cause of her deep and almost increasing sorrow, and many a pitying glance rested upon her now. She had exchanged the tasteful dresses, in which Isabel had delighted in arraying her, for the sombre habiliments of mourning, and never had her beauty, though more ethereal than formerly, appeared to such advantage. She was paler than usual, her form had lost much of its roundness, and her eyes seldom had any other expression besides one of deep seriousness.

Insensibly she had taken her accustomed place in the household, the servants coming to her for counsel and assistance, and apparently, the inner lives of the trio who dwelt at Vernon Grove, were as peaceful and systematic as the outer arrangements, and a looker-on

would have thought that Sybil, especially, was a happy person to have found such a friend as Vernon, and such a man as Albert Linwood to be her protector through life.

But no one knew the secrets of that young heart, no one knew of the struggle that she hourly underwent. Each day she felt that Albert was not to her what she desired in one who was to be her companion nearer than a friend, whom she was to cherish for better or worse, and though she could not define in what particular lay the deficiency, and blamed herself for her want of appreciation, still she could not overcome the indefinable repugnance that he inspired, and which she felt was undermining her very existence. True, his tenderness was almost womanly; true he guarded her against the shadow of an evil, and loved on madly and blindly, content with a cold "I thank you," or a barely suffered caress; still Sybil grew each day more unhappy and silent, and the glad promise of her youth, the blessing of a cheerful spirit, seemed departing from her.

The one object in her life, and that in which she exerted every power, was to try to hide, at least from Vernon, what she suffered, and even though she failed, to accept the lot which he had marked out for her with uncomplaining patience. Though he had never explained or alluded to his conduct in regard to the brief note which she had received from him when she was at Mr. Clayton's, he had pressed her so earnestly to remain under his roof until her marriage, or after, if Albert's engagements permitted, that Sybil had almost forgotten that terrible fiat of banishment, or remembered it only as a painful dream. One thing besides her own imme-

diate troubles gave her cause for weakness, and this was a change which had come over Vernon since her return; he was no longer the Vernon of old, impetuous and imperious, but gentler and more sad, avoiding the presence of his guests, and never intruding upon them unless in the civilities which his position of host entailed upon him. He no longer enlivened their home circle by his wonderful conversational powers, nor was his laugh that winning contagious laugh, which bespoke a heart at ease, overheard as Sybil had sometimes heard it in the days that were past. Morning after morning, after having been led to his favorite haunts by his servant, he spent long hours alone, and at twilight, that hour which he and Sybil had ever enjoyed as the crowning happiness of a happy day, instead of the brilliant compositions which he used to improvise, he would strike a few dirge-like notes upon his piano, and pour out his soul in strains as touching and as sad as the instrumental music which accompanied them.

" Short swallow-flights of song, that dip  
Their wings in tears and skim away."

And such was the life at Vernon Grove, monotonous, quiet, and too calm to be natural, for even Linwood's voice was toned down to a whisper, and his cheerful spirit imbibed somewhat of the prevailing solemnity which he felt hung like a pall over them, and which was not exactly the "jubilee" that Sybil had spoken of as connected with his return from his wanderings abroad. But an event soon occurred, materially changing the state of things then existing at Vernon Grove.

One night after they had all retired to their rooms,

Albert and Vernon to rest, and Sybil, as was often the case now, to the serious contemplation of her peculiar position,—seated by an open window, she perceived a dense smoke arising from the wing of the house in which Richard and Linwood slept, and soon the conviction forced itself upon her that the building was on fire. Suddenly, as if to confirm her in her opinion, a bright flame shot upwards in the darkness, and Sybil, now fully aware of the danger, and with but one impulse in her mind, rushed towards Vernon's chamber. That she was the betrothed of another, that her duty should have led her first to the rescue of her promised husband did not occur to her; she simply obeyed the promptings of that strong inward suggestion which overmastered every other, and which said as plainly as words, "He, Mr. Vernon is in danger; *save him.*" Everything was blank; her world contained but one individual; her heart beat but for one other besides herself; the prayer which escaped from her trembling lips breathed only for the welfare of one.

Speeding across the corridor, towards Vernon's room, she found that her passage to it was impeded by a cloud of smoke, and the heat was so intense that it would be almost impossible for her to pass through it; but Sybil was a courageous mortal, and since she had given up her happiness because Vernon had willed it, it mattered little to her whether she sacrificed her life also. For a moment she stood, irresolute; simply the yielding up of her existence for the welfare of one whom she loved was an easy matter to her, but the probable suffering which would lead to it, the sharp agony of the intense scorching heat, the stifling suffocation, appalled

her. The wavering only lasted for a brief time ; drawing a shawl which she had thrown over her shoulders more closely about her, and covering as much of her head and face as was possible, she uttered a hasty prayer, and plunging boldly into the thickening smoke, at last reached Vernon's door. With a firm hand she knocked to awaken him, and told him in a few words, that the house was on fire, beseeching him to open his door as soon as possible, in order that they might think of some plan to gain assistance ; she added that she could not retrace her steps, as the flames had crossed the corridor, through which she had just passed, but that she would wait patiently there until he opened the door.

Light and darkness being the same to Vernon, he hastily dressed himself, and was soon ready to admit Sybil, and to hear further of the progress of the fire, but in the meantime the poor girl had suffered agony, for the flames gained upon her each moment, and her hands and arms seemed seared as with a hot iron. Her waiting there appeared to her like an eternity, and she thought of rushing back even through the flames, anything seeming preferable to the fearful misery of being slowly burnt to death where she stood ; but at length the door opened, and she sprang into the room with a glad cry of unspeakable joy, while Vernon, feeling the intense heat, knew in part, but only in part, what she had suffered.

"You must shut the door again," said she, quickly, "or the draught will force the flames this way. God has been very good to you and to me, Mr. Vernon ; if I had been one moment later I could not have come to you, and what might you not have suffered ; perhaps in

your unconscious slumber you would have been burned to death."

"I feel that you have saved my life, dear Sybil," he answered, "that life which I would willingly lay down for you, my child; but this is no time for thanks or congratulation;—where is Albert? You have aroused him, of course, and have warned him of his danger.

"No," said Sybil, in a low tone, "I came here first, I did not think of *him*."

A steady pulsation of joy, even in that moment of peril, throbbed in Vernon's heart, but duty was stronger even than the love which he felt for Sybil. His first impulse was to ask her to say those words once more, those sweet, low, musical words which seemed to give him the chief place in her memory; but in an instant he remembered how natural it was that Sybil should endeavor to arouse him, the master of the house, first; how habit had taught her, since her childhood, to refer everything to him which related to the judgment or a course of action to be pursued; and again, how custom had always led her to offer him her arm as a guide.

"Sybil, we must remain here no longer," he said, "I hear the flames roaring without, and human lives are in jeopardy. There is another entrance to my chamber which leads out upon the lawn. Through that passage we must go; then there is a second flight of steps which will conduct you from the basement up into Albert's room; when we have reached that, you must be a heroine once more, awake him, if he is not, as I suppose, already aroused by the light, and the unusual sounds, and in search of his treasure whom he will find flown away."



*"And leave you in your blindness alone!"* said Sybil in a passionate tone unusual to her; "how do I know but the flames may reach you even at the foot of the staircase before I return. No; better let me die, leave me here and let me die before you send me away from you again."

"Hush, Sybil," he said, "be calm!"

They were passing down the narrow passage, Sybil guiding him out into the starlight, and as they neared the entrance the damp night air came gratefully to Vernon in contrast with that hot stifling mass of heated smoke, but Sybil scarcely knew or felt the change.

*"Why must I be silent?"* she said in the same reckless impulsive tone; "do you wish to make me remember what I cannot very easily forget, that my life belongs to another, that I am bound even as a slave? But I will *not* be silent; I will say now what I have not dared to say before"——

The sentence was finished with a groan, and Vernon knew by the dead heavy weight that fell against him that Sybil had fainted, and her strange words he concluded were nothing more than delirium occasioned by the excitement through which she had passed, the bewildering experiences of the hour.

They had reached the foot of the steps, and the way was free from impediments to him now; he knew that he was upon that green soft sward, and every inch of it was familiar to him, and that he had only to proceed forward a few paces to gain a garden chair in which to place her.

It was clear to him that Sybil had fainted, and he judged rightly, but he little dreamed that it was from pain; that her delicate hands and arms had been scorched

and blistered by the fierce heat as she stood waiting at his door. He only knew that his beloved was in his arms once more; that he held her there for the last time ere another claimed her for his own; that her breath was upon his cheek, and her heart near his. All the evils in the world seemed light while thus she lay. Even God would forgive him, he said to himself, for calling her his own then, and bending over her insensible form, he addressed her in many a name of endearment, and with a reckless kind of frenzy, he kissed her brow, her cheeks, her lips, and called heaven to witness that he loved her as never man had loved before.

Soon he became conscious of approaching footsteps and voices, and among the rest Albert's.

"God of mercy," exclaimed Albert, "we have found her at last; speak, Vernon, tell me that she is not dead or dying that she lies thus."

"I trust not," said Vernon, trying to be calm, and resigning her to Albert with a sigh; "in order to rouse some one, for I believe that she was the first to discover that the house was on fire, she came to my room, and the confusion, the responsibility, the fright, proved too much for her, and caused her to faint. She has been in this unconscious state once before to my own knowledge, and it will be sometime before she recovers."

"Thank God!" said Albert, as he bent over her, "thank God that it is not death;" then folding her in his arms, he tried to wake her to consciousness with burning accents of love.

The old demon of passion pulled hard at Vernon's heart. Linwood's words maddened him, and the deso-

lating fearful scourge of jealousy raged furiously in his breast.

"What of the fire?" he asked impatiently, "leave her to me, Albert, and follow the men who have gone to try to extinguish it. As I can be of no use, I will sit here with her until she recovers, while you can direct the hands, and if possible save a portion of the house."

"The right wing of the building," returned Albert, "I fear must be consumed; I left a portion of the laborers trying to extinguish the flames on the other side, while I brought a few this way in my search for Sybil, whom the servants and I failed to discover in any portion of the house, although we concluded in the end that as both your and her rooms were vacant, you had sought shelter where we found you at last. As you suggest, I will go and try to give some system and order to their endeavors, but even with their best exertions, I fear the house will not be habitable for some time, and to prepare you for the worst, Vernon, it may, possibly, if the wind rises, burn to the ground, and then what could we do with Sybil—where could we find the nearest shelter for her?"

"Leave that to me," said Vernon, "I have already thought of a plan. I purchased the cottage in which she lived formerly, not long ago, and it is in the care of a trusty servant—if you will remain here and do what you can to assist those brave men, I will take her there, John driving us in the carriage. Save everything that you can belonging to *her*, and tell Mary to follow after us in your vehicle with every comfort which she thinks Sybil may require, and if we start immediately, I hope the

poor child will open her eyes upon a more peaceful scene, and one of a less exciting nature than this."

"Your plan is the best that could be imagined," was Albert's answer. "Vernon," he continued solemnly, taking his hand, "it is not for me to tell you, her protector, her friend, the guardian of her childhood, the faithful watcher of her maturer years, to shield her as you would the best treasure in God's giving, but oh, my friend, when I say to *you* be gentle with her gentle nature, be patient with her in her helplessness, you will realize how much, how entirely I love Sybil Gray."

And so it came to pass that Sybil, leaving the stately mansion of Vernon Grove a mass of thick smoke and desolating flame, was bound on a pilgrimage to that humble homestead, the cottage in which she was born.

The rocking motion of the carriage and the current of cool night air, soon restored her to consciousness, but far better would it have been had she been insensible, for she awoke to experience a burning fever in her veins and a sensation as though liquid fire were playing over her hands and arms. Though her gaze could not penetrate through the thick darkness, she knew that her head was pillowed upon a beating heart, and that an arm was supporting her form. She knew that but one cared to hold her there and thus, and but to one belonged the privilege.

"Where are we going, Albert?" she asked faintly, "When will this dark mysterious ride come to an end?"

"It is not Albert, it is I," said Vernon in a voice trembling with emotion. "Albert is with the men trying to extinguish the fire. Are you better, Sybil? Are you in any pain? Can you lie tranquilly until you have

regained your strength, or until we reach the little cottage where you and your grandmother once lived?"

"Awhile ago I did feel pain," she answered, "fierce, intense, burning pain, for the flesh upon my hands and arms is all scorched and shrivelled away; but it was in a good, a righteous cause, and now there is no pain, for *you* are safe,—only a perfect, perfect rest."

Vernon thought that her mind was wandering still, and realized the cause in the horrible truth that her hands and arms were in the condition which she had described, and the agony made her delirious. He thought, too, that he might be cruelly bruising them by the rough clasp of his own rude touch, and by a gentle movement he released her in a measure from his supporting arms.

"Are you tired of me," she asked reproachfully, "do I weary you? do you want to put me far away from you still, needing as I do now, more than ever, a heart, a home, a resting-place?"

"Tired of *you*, little Sybil!" said Vernon in a tone of the deepest tenderness and tempted almost beyond endurance to tell her all; "tired of the light of my life, my only hope and joy? God knows that I never should tire of you; I am only wretched and forlorn, for soon my Sybil will leave me, and my home lies in ruins behind us. But what right have such as I," he asked bitterly, "to Sybil or home?"

"And is our beautiful house at the Grove a ruin, and is this the reason why we are taking refuge at the cottage, and shall you be poor now, Mr. Vernon, with no home but that humble one?"

"And what if it be so, what then?" asked Vernon

moodily. A sudden sharp pang of bodily agony elicited a groan from Sybil; the torture of those fearful burns was almost more than she could bear; then that sudden anguish passed away somewhat, but not entirely, and the paroxysm left her calmer when it was over, and she gasped out a few hurried words.

"Soon—some other time—when this agony is less, I have something to say to you, but not now."

"Is there anything that I can do for you, any evil that I can avert?" said Vernon anxiously, drawing her tenderly towards him again, as though to protect her even then, "tell me; will you not let me help you with my advice or sympathy?"

The answer came in a way that he was all unprepared for.

"*Yes, Richard.*"

The words were slowly and deliberately spoken, and thrilled him through; the tender tone brought the hot blood to his cheek; he could not believe that he was awake, but thought himself under the influence of a dream and was silent.

Like a poverty-stricken man who has prayed for relief and suddenly finds himself struck, bruised, and felled to the ground with heavy showers of massive gold, so felt Vernon; the precious metal lay within his very grasp and yet it was denied him to gather it.

"Ah, Sybil," said he, breaking the silence at last, "I must do my duty by you though keen suffering to myself be the penalty. Though you promised to call me '*Richard*,' when you returned, and though the sound is sweeter than any that ever came to mortal ear, you must

do so no more now that you belong to another. If he were here, Sybil, do you think that he would regard with complacency or any approval whatever that word spoken from your lips to me."

Recklessly came her reply, a mad whirlwind in contrast with his calm, deliberate, cautious utterance; mad enough, strong enough, to demolish any barrier between them, powerful enough to bend, ay, to break even his iron will.

*"I know not, care not, Richard."*

But he kept his vow: love and honor made him strong; love for Sybil, whom he now scarcely regarded as a responsible person, but as one tortured into delirium by pain, and that strong chain of friendship by which he was bound to Albert, and which, rather than sever, he would have encountered death. Still something further must be said, and that he spoke desperately.

"Sybil, Sybil, beware; you have redeemed your promise given under other circumstances than these; but if *you* do not, Albert would care had he heard you give utterance to the word which you used just now. Think you, if you were to me what you are to him, loving me and beloved by me, that I could calmly hear you call him '*Albert?*' Think you that I could spare a tone, a whisper of tenderness? Why, Sybil," he continued, eloquently pleading for another's right, and advocating another's cause, "were you mine, think you that I could bear you from my presence? No, you would be mine—mine exclusively, my treasure, my joy, my religion, my life, and next to the God whom you have taught me to love, my all. It is thus with Albert, his

affection for you is as jealous, as requiring as this. Ah, no, welcome as that word is, I must not hear it again; once, I might have wished it, but oh, not now, not now."

"Thank you for reminding me of my duty," answered Sybil, with something of her old dignity of manner, though in a bitter tone. "If I can, mark me, Mr. Vernon, *if I can*, I will be to you what you would have me, cold and distant," then withdrawing herself entirely from his support, she uttered a piteous moan of exhaustion and pain, and added in a voice of anguish that long vibrated in Vernon's ear, "but you are too cruel, almost too cruel to your poor little suffering Sybil."

These were the last coherent words that Sybil said for some days, for when they lifted her from the carriage and placed her on the bed where she once as a child lay, a brain fever, added to the severe injuries she had sustained, brought on a raving delirium, and the kind and skilful physician who was sent for, plainly told Vernon, who besought him to be candid, that he feared that all his care and experience could not raise her from her desperate state to health. And then with as much delicacy as he could, he informed Albert and himself that they must be prepared to see her, whom they loved so well, the victim of a painful and lingering death; nevertheless, while there was life, there was hope, and that much depended upon unwearied attention to those dreadful burns, and careful watching.

Careful watching! the dove watches not her nestlings so jealously, nor the mother her child more exclusively than did those men, Vernon and Linwood, watch the poor sufferer who raved in delirium in that little chamber, not indeed in any words which could betray the secrets



of her heart, but as if the mention of her cottage-home had brought back old memories in her unconsciousness, she fancied herself a child once more, roaming in freedom there among the forest birds, and gathering wild flowers in her path. Both were bound to her, Vernon and Linwood, by a triple cord, and all jealousy, all envy were laid far away. Were she to die, Linwood felt that the world would be suddenly deprived of all interest and beauty; he dared not contemplate the possibility of a future, even though it brought to him fame greater than mortal had ever won before, without the light of Sybil's smile. *Sybil and Death!* It was madness to breathe the two words in connexion. After a life spent together, a life of perfect happiness and congeniality, he could fancy her hand in hand with himself, calmly journeying onward to the grave, and should the summons come to her first, being willing to part with her only because it would be an earnest of his soon rejoining her to part never more.

*Sybil, dead!* said Vernon in communion with himself, in thoughts which he scarcely dared to breathe to the winds, she who, to save him, had brought herself low even unto the gates of death: she who had counted suffering but a slight thing, so that he suffered not! Oh, were she to die, willingly would he make his grave beside her, welcoming the pall, the bier, and even the dreaded uncertainty of the hereafter, as a happy exchange for the positive pangs of acute suffering which such an event would bring.

*But Sybil did not die!* Youth and strength triumphed at last over that terrible attack, and she awoke to consciousness. Now that her fearful and incoherent ravings

were over, and all immediate danger past, the faithful housekeeper, who had been devoted to her through her illness, persuaded Vernon and Linwood to leave her entirely to her care, as the excitement of seeing them and conversing with them might occasion a relapse, and as it was nearer to their precious charge than the cottage sitting-room, they spent the greater part of their time in the little entry which communicated with her room, pacing to and fro, watching for the tidings which were brought them at intervals of the welfare of the invalid, and in arranging offerings of fruit and flowers or other little gifts which they thought would amuse or interest Sybil, the sending of which was accompanied always with cheering messages of affection.

As Sybil became convalescent and once more was interested in external objects, when the ticking of a clock attracted her as something which broke the monotony of that long season of confinement; when a stray ray of sunshine playing upon the wall assumed to her almost the significance of the real presence of some cheerful visitor; and when even the reminiscences of her old attendant, whose early years were anything but eventful, acquired a vast importance in her lonely patient's estimation, it is not to be wondered at that she often found herself trying to catch the tones of Vernon's and Linwood's voices, or that it entertained her if she but heard a word now and then from the little neighboring entry.

One morning, one Spring-promising morning, her attendant had purposely left the door which led from Sybil's room into the passage open, in order to accustom her somewhat to the fresh air ere she returned into

it, and leaving Sybil alone for a short time, went to attend to some household arrangement. Lying there feeling stronger and better than she had done for many days, she heard the voices of her watchful guardians in conversation, and though hearing her own name mentioned, and knowing that it was almost a breach of trust to listen, still she had neither the strength nor the will to let them know her proximity; a kind of trance-like spell enveloped her faculties and kept her mute.

But that hour achieved more for her than her physician's most devoted attention, and while she listened with a smile upon her pale face, and her eyes bedewed with grateful tears, it seemed to her as though some heavenly visitor stood before her and softly whispered, "*Sybil, behold your reward.*"

"This is the third week that she has lain there," she heard Albert say, "uncomplaining and gentle; what patient endurance is hers, what true Christian forbearance."

"Yes," replied Vernon, "Sybil acts out her principles as one would have the truly religious do; when one thinks of the pain of a single trifling burn, and then reflects on what she has to bear, that excruciating agony, that tedious dressing of the wounds, that retaining for hours the same position without a murmur of impatience, one cannot but be struck with her fortitude. Then add to these, that, through which, thank God, she has already passed, the chill of ague, the burning thirst of fever and its terrible restlessness, all borne as though they were but a feather laid upon her,—the life which she has lived since that fearful night is a sermon preaching better things than a thousand eloquent discourses."

"Hers is indeed a patient spirit," answered Albert, "and it is with no little self-congratulation that I think that she who is the fairest creation I have ever seen, should also be the purest and best, and that the example of the woman who is to be my life-companion must ever be a gracious one to me. What an unenviable fate would mine have been had I, with my love of the beautiful, chosen a wife whose attractions were merely in the outward adorning and not in the perfection of the inner life."

"You *are* fortunate," replied Vernon, scarcely repressing a sigh, "and when I resign her to you, it will be with this testimony, that it was she who first planted the germ of resignation and religious feeling in my breast. Often the poor child has seen it wither and fade, but by her prayers and tears has guarded and watered it until it has grown into a wide-spreading branch; not that I boast of it, Linwood, for we are talking now as man to man, with freedom and unreserve, but because I rejoice that her prayers are answered, and that she, with her innocent trust, has made me almost what her aspirations have aimed at, one who humbly, and with a need of His mercy, loves and fears God."

Sybil crossed her bruised hands upon her breast, and raised her eyes upwards as though her glance could pierce the inner heaven, and though feeling happier than she had ever been on earth before, she longed at that moment for the power to take wings and utter her gratitude and delight for the words she had heard from Vernon, at the very throne of the Almighty Father.

It was thus that her attendant found her on her return with that rapt angelic look, so much more beau-

tiful than ever, so luminous with purity and joy, and remembering that she had promised to allow Vernon and Linwood to come in for a few minutes to see her young charge, now was the time she thought, when a faint color blushed in her cheeks, and her eyes glistened almost with the brightness of health, to redeem that promise.

Telling Sybil that her faithful friends desired to congratulate her upon being so much better, she asked her permission to allow them to enter.

"Yes," said she gladly, "let them come in; how faithful, how constant they have been."

"But only for a few minutes," said the careful nurse, charging Sybil not to exert herself by conversation, and with another look at her patient to see if the rosy flush still remained, she went to acquaint Vernon and Linwood with the joyful intelligence that her patient would see them.

She was the Sybil, and yet *not* the Sybil that Linwood had last seen; the first was of earth, the other a vision from heaven.

She was lying half-propped up by pillows, with her face in full relief against their snowy whiteness; her brow was marble-like in its pallor, her lips like those of a carved statue, not crimsoned as Sybil's had once been with the rose-bud hue of health, but almost colorless, while her cheeks were so faintly tinged with the rose that one might have thought their blush a reflection of the skies at dawn. Her hair, always floating in natural curls on either side of her brow, was now put back from her face in a smooth mass like a cluster of pale golden threads, while over her bosom in graceful folds, lay her

white robe, with its delicate edging of lace, giving additional softness and purity to the whole.

Sybil was the first to speak.

"How good, how kind you have been," she said, looking from one to the other with moistened eyes. She *glanced* over at Linwood, but upon Vernon her gaze rested with lingering fondness.

Led by the sound of her voice, Vernon stepped forward to take her hand, the common, every-day act of the blind man's life, something that stood in lieu of a sympathising expression which others could throw into their eyes.

Sybil stopped him as he approached. "You forget," said she playfully, "that a burn is a long time in healing, and no lily-white hand can I offer you as did the dames in days of old. My faithful knights must live in hope that one day I may fasten a favor on their shields, when the bandages from my poor disfigured hands are removed."

"Forgive me for my thoughtlessness," replied Vernon while he turned away from Sybil that she might not see on his face the anguish that he felt. "I forgot for one moment that terrible experience in my joy at hearing your voice again. Would to God, Sybil, that mine had been the fate to perish that night in the flames if it would have saved you from a single instant of suffering."

It was far from Sybil's thoughts to awaken any sad memories, or to have that visit aught but a cheerful one, and hasting to change the conversation, she dwelt upon the pleasures which were in store for her, and listened gladly to the plans which Albert and Vernon had been laying for her, until the minutes allotted to them by the

nurse passed swiftly away, and she warned them that the time had expired. While she was guiding Vernon out into the passage, Sybil beheld with a terrible sinking of the heart that Albert remained behind.

"Sybil, my own, my beautiful," he whispered, "I thought I loved you once, but my love for you was weak compared with the almost worship that I feel for you now. Could you not speak one word of affection to be to me a memory, a joy, until I see you again?"

Her lips tried to articulate, but no word reached his ear, while a spasm like that of pain crossed her face, and her white lids closed helplessly over her eyes.

"You must go now, Mr. Linwood," said the affrighted attendant, who glanced at Sybil as she returned, "am I not right, Miss Sybil?"

"Yes, yes," was the impatient answer, and when the door was closed upon him, Sybil alarmed her nurse, who had no key to her words, and thought that her delirium was returning by her wild manner, and wilder expression.

"This cannot, shall not last," she said, "I must end it, or I must die."

## CHAPTER XXV.

"Farewell ; farewell ; may never come to thee  
These bitter tears now sadly crushing me,  
*I give thee up*,—thy good requires my pain,  
And thou shalt never hear from me again  
Affection's words—nor shall thy eyes e'er see  
One look that speaks a lingering love for thee,  
For I have given thee up."

"'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all."

HEALTH came once more to Sybil, as the rosy dawn overspreads the morning sky. First with a pale flush, then a rosier gleam, and then a blushing red. She was waiting for her full strength to perform a duty, the neglecting of which haunted her like a nightmare, and which she knew must not long be deferred, and at last she felt that the hour had arrived.

Vernon spent most of his time at the Grove, endeavoring to lay plans to remedy the ruin which reigned there, and it was well that he thus had an object to distract him from gloomy thought. He tried to cheat himself into the idea that he was becoming more light-hearted and cheerful, when in fact he was only endeavoring, for the sake of those whom he loved, to cultivate cheerfulness, and when he returned to the cottage at evening, though a heavy and sad heart lay beneath, his



was the merriest laugh, he the most buoyant of the trio there.

One morning when Vernon had thus left Sybil and Albert together, to enjoy, as he imagined, as fond lovers, the sweet freshness of the day, the coming Spring time, and the luxury of quiet interchange of thought, Sybil proposed a drive through the beautiful woods which surrounded the cottage as a sure means of entirely restoring her to her wonted strength. She had not miscalculated the effect which she thought it would produce, and it was after her return, when her limbs were stronger, her blood bounding healthily through her veins, her heart, even, braver for the fresh morning air, that she said to herself—"Now I will do what I must do, even though to Albert I bring a sorrow incurable, and gain coldness and disapproval and a second banishment at Mr. Vernon's hands, for I will not be false to myself and God another day."

There were in the little cottage parlor Sybil and Albert. The season was that of late Winter, when the mid-day is a foretaste of Spring. The evergreen trellised vine, which Sybil had trained as a child, hung through the open casement into the room, and the sunbeams flickered through the leaves and played lazily upon the floor at Sybil's feet. The air brought with it a drowsy influence unfitting one for action; the birds hopped noiselessly from branch to branch; the cattle in the distance were passively lying in the fields; everything breathed of the *fulness of rest*. All nature seemed plotting against Sybil and the work which she had to do. In the still air, the cloudless sky, the silent earth, there seemed to be a pause, but had an angel appeared beckon-

ing her out to wander in Paradise, she would have said calmly—"By-and-by; *now* there is something for me to do."

She sat in a low chair by the window with the dreamy influence of that brilliant noon upon her, with no remains of her illness lingering about her, save a faint scar upon her hands, which she almost hoped for the sake of the memory it brought would never entirely be effaced. Albert leant over her and was saying something playfully about her brilliant color, and how well it would contrast one day, not far in the future, with white orange blossoms. They looked happy lovers—they were—what? Their words will show.

She could not mistake his meaning, and with a start woke into life.

"Sit down, Albert," she said, "here before me; I have something to say to you."

So seldom did Sybil express a wish in Linwood's presence, that ere it was well uttered, he dropt the ringlet of gold which he had caressingly coiled around his finger and obeyed her, and sitting full in the light of her eyes awaited what would follow. Then she gazed quietly, steadily, at him as though she would read his very soul and measure what he could bear mentally, he who loved her so.

Albert took her hand, while she scarcely observed the action, so absorbed was she in thought, and pressed it to his lips.

"Ah, this little hand," he said fondly, "this little scarred hand; tell me, Sybil, when shall I have the right to call it my own?"

Sybil, still gazing down into his eyes with that search-

ing glance so unlike every other glance of hers, which had ever before been turned away from his, firmly drew her hand away.

"Albert," she said, "you must bear patiently with me, you must listen calmly to me. I am about to tell you something which will make us both sorrowful all of our lives, but not to say it would bring to *me* madness. Promise me that you will not frighten me by any demonstration of violence, for I feel that undue excitement might carry me back to those fearful hours of delirium through which I have so lately passed."

"Anything that you have to say," he answered with assumed calmness, "I am ready and willing to hear."

"Then I will say it at once," she replied, turning away from him at last the fixed gaze of her eyes. "It would be hypocrisy to act towards you any longer as if I did or ever could love you. For Mr. Vernon's sake whose wish it is, and for yours, I have tried with earnest prayers to accustom myself to the idea that in you, I should at last find that peace and happiness which one would naturally expect, situated as we have been. I have schooled my heart, I have put fetters on my free soul in vain. That the fault is altogether independent of yourself, that you are all tenderness and goodness, and that I am ungrateful and wicked almost, I humbly confess; but why waste words upon the prelude? Albert Linwood, I can never be your wife."

Linwood's face had gradually assumed an expression of mute despair, and then when the whole truth came, he bent his head slowly and held his hand before his eyes as though to avert some horrible doom which would crush him to death. He did not weep, he did not moan;

Sybil would have been glad had he done either; anything was better than that deep dead silence, that up-raised arm and deprecating look, the quivering which passed over that strong man's frame.

"Albert," she said softly, removing his hand from that fixed posture of despair and looking upon him pityingly, "let me be to you a sister, a friend; speak to me; tell me that what I have done has not made you hate me."

"*Hate you!*" he answered in a voice of unutterable tenderness, "it would be hard to do that beloved." Then changing his tone and looking at her fiercely, he continued—"And yet I ought to hate you; I ought to hate one who, by a few utterances, things called *words* that have the power to blast a life for ever, has taken away in an instant of time hope, joy, happiness, and left me desolate, ay, *desolate*, Sybil, take it in its full wide meaning and bring it home to yourself. Reverse the case," he said, with increasing excitement, grasping her wrist and compelling her to listen to him, "suppose that *you* had learned to love some favored one with your whole being, that never prayer was uttered by you which included not that other, that you looked forward to a life spent with him as a consummation of bliss not ending here, but continuing on into eternity;—then imagine some terrible fate coming between you and the loved one, more terrible than if the man dying of thirst should be denied water, the weary man rest. Would you not be tempted, mind you, only *tempted*, to curse that fate?"

"And so you curse *me*, Albert?" she said mournfully, "*pray* rather for those who despitefully use you and persecute you."

"No, no," said he, drawing her towards him with inexpressible tenderness of manner, "how can I curse what is mine, and you know that you are mine, Sybil, now and for ever. There is no escape from a promise given calmly and willingly as you gave yours. Sybil, I cannot let you go, you are too precious, too much a part of my very life; yes, thank God, *you are mine.*"

Alas for Sybil, her task became more difficult each moment; it was almost as hard to gain her end as to live the false unnatural life of the past few months, but she had plunged boldly into the stream, and nought remained for her but to seek, with what strength she could, the opposite shore.

"I know," she said, "I know that you have my promise to be yours, *and that you love me.* It is because you do love me so fervently that I make this appeal to you. Oh, Albert, you would never be quite happy, with your exacting nature, in a life without affection on my part; there would always be a cloud over our home as if God had forgotten us in dealing out his sunshine; our mornings would be cheerless, our evenings gloomy, because of the want of perfect sympathy, and I feel, I feel in my inmost heart that ours would not be the true life. There is a better, a happier state of being, when the pulses bound at the sound of a beloved voice, when the blood runs swifter at the approach of a coming step, when the heart, satisfied with its destiny, says, 'I am content!' This could never be our united experience," said Sybil, her cheek kindling at the picture she had called up. "Then let me appeal to the very love which you have for me, to release me from the promise, which I gave before I had

a realizing sense that I was acting out a grievous wrong, a sin. Say but four words, Albert, four simple words spoken because of your generous nature; if only breathed in a whisper I shall hear them; say to me, '*Sybil, you are free.*' "

In the earnestness of her appeal, she arose and laid her hand upon Albert's, while her beseeching eyes were raised expectantly to his. She might have said as other women had said before, after a solemn promise to be constant,—“Go,”—one word having the power and significance of many, but the memory of perjury would have haunted her through a lifetime. She wished him to resign her by an act of his own will.

There was a pause a long, painful pause; a mighty struggle raged in Linwood's breast; he felt like a shipwrecked mariner who sees that the frail plank to which he clings must inevitably be swept from his grasp, and yet with the certainty of his doom hanging over him, is loath to loosen his frantic hold.

“Have patience with me, dearest,” he said at last, “you have appealed to *my love*, that strong, absorbing, second nature of mine; have patience with me awhile; I would be alone with my thoughts, and make the trial in imagination, to see if I can do what you ask; like the martyrs of old, I would measure my strength of endurance and consider if I could bear unflinchingly the cruel tortures, the fierce devouring flames which assail me and which at last *must* reach my heart.”

Saying these words he put her away from him gently, and paced the room restlessly, as though he were a criminal pacing his narrow cell. His eyes rested upon her not for a single instant, he seemed to be oblivious

to her presence; his thoughts all introverted, *himself* was the one subject of his contemplation.

At last there was a cessation in that quick nervous tread and he stood before her and gazed at her long and earnestly. His look was haggard, his whole expression was changed, and years of suffering seemed to be stamped upon his face.

"Sybil, look up," he said, "if upon the outer man is pictured what I feel within, then there will be something for you to remember in all the years of the future. Not, dearest, that I would have the memory a suffering, a sorrow, but because I would have you feel that it is no light thing to which you have appealed, no passing fancy, but a principle of my life mingling with my being, as the heart throbs in my breast, or the blood flows in my body; had my love been less, had it been selfish, did I not count myself as nothing in comparison with your peace and happiness, this sacrifice would never have been made, but since you wish it, dearest;—*Sybil, you are free!*"

Her joy told itself in her suddenly clasped hands and an inadvertent, "Oh! Albert, I thank you."

"She thanks me, oh, God!" he exclaimed bitterly, "she thanks me, she might have spared me *that*."

"Forgive me," said Sybil, her eyes filling with tears, "I only meant."—

"You meant what you said," he answered mournfully, "and I must not blame you for your truth; but oh, my beloved, my own precious one, my lost treasure,—the years will be very dreary to me now; summer will bring me no sunshine, winter no joyous fireside, time no glad elastic renewal of youth. Stars will shine, but not

for me, Sybil, for you alone gave beauty to my life, and you alone can take that beauty away. Remember me, dearest, as ever thinking of you, ever praying for your welfare, and so mingling your memory with each noble inspiration, each successful effort, each triumph in my profession, that my love of you and love of it will be one and the same. Every blue sky will tell me of your eyes, dearest, those tender soul-eyes that won me with their wondrous beauty; every golden sunset remind me of your wealth of rippling hair; every line of grace in earth or air bring me in thought to you. Say to Vernon that I have gone, for I cannot see him with this weight of anguish crushing me, gone for ever from him and you. Yes, *I must go*," he answered in reply to her appealing look, "for were I to stay, my eyes would haunt you ever with their mute sorrow, while turning upon you especially their old loving glance. And now, Sybil, farewell; if you ever think of me, if ever you say to yourself 'Where is the wanderer now?' imagine me as toiling for fame, not for any joy it might bring me, but simply as an object in life, something to sweeten a bitter memory, something to blunt the sharp point of an eternal agony. Seated there with your head bowed and revelling perchance in your release like an uncaged bird (I blame you not, dear love), you little know at what a price you have bought your freedom; behold in it a crowning sacrifice of affection, the very perfection of love, yes, Sybil, you are *free*."

Softly he raised her head and kissed her brow, and smiling strangely that she wept, bade her not waste her tears upon his sorrows—then laying his hands linger-



ingly upon her fair drooping head, he looked once again at her wondrous beauty, as though to impress it unfadingly upon his memory, and departed from her path for ever.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"The banquet and the song;  
By day the tourney, and by night  
The merry dance traced far and light,  
The masquers quaint, the pageant bright,  
The revel loud and long."

"Rich? ask'st those if he's rich? Observe me, Sir!  
His money bags are *torpid* they're so full!  
Crammed, glutton-like, with lumps of spendthrift gold,  
That swell their sides and sleep!"

BARRY CORNWALL.

"Good resolves a moment hot,  
Fairly begun but finished not."

MR. CLAYTON'S house was still a central point of gaiety, and Isabel a star that shed lustre over it, but at times there was an inexplicable expression of joy in her lovely face which was apart from, and independent of the crowd who gathered nightly around her, a look as though she were listening to music unheard by other ears, or saw beautiful forms visible only to herself. But her secret, whatever it was, did not interrupt her life of thoughtless pleasure, for who so exquisitely attired, so bent upon enjoyment, so glittering with costly gems as the fair mistress of that palace-home?

Nor was its master changed in aught since the opening of our story save in the outward bodily change that

years had made. Now, as then, he was flushed with success; everything that he touched seemed to turn to gold; no speculation, however wild, but yielded him abundantly, no investment so extravagant but that it brought him a return tenfold.

Pale hollow-eyed men, harassed with toil and failure, besought this flourishing Cræsus for his assistance or simply his advice, since he was so successful in all that he undertook; but the last he was not always ready to give, because it might teach them his secret of luck—the first never. Heads of charity societies appealed to him in vain. What had he to do with charity, when he paid an exorbitant tax to support the poor? Little bare-footed children pleaded with him for a penny for some starving mother, but he scowled forbiddingly upon their upturned faces, and sent them away empty-handed.

White hairs silvered his head, reminding him of the flight of time; death aimed a fatal arrow at friends and companions to tell him that the grave was the end of all, and still the toil was only for gold—no other treasure did he lay up than that.

Albert Linwood had entered like a shadow among them, and like a shadow had passed by. In a few words to Isabel, he had told her what had come to pass, and then bade her farewell for ever. Something like a tear dimmed her eyes as she listened to his touching words, but a thoughtless smile succeeded almost before he had passed from her sight; she had other things to think of besides the story of another's sorrow.

To Florence, when Isabel carelessly related the account of Linwood's visit and its cause, the intelligence came like a death-blow. Her existence suddenly became a

blank, for her schemes had proved useless, her toils futile, her life a wreck—made so by her own imprudence and folly. With no object to interest her, more and more restless she became, more and more repining and discontented, until even Isabel deserted her once intimate friend, or welcomed her only when she could be entertaining and cheerful to her guests or herself.

The soft mild earnest of Spring which saw the parting between Sybil and Albert, was followed by a spell of severe and almost unprecedented cold, one of those atmospheric phenomena for which there is no accounting, when the chilling ice and snow, treading close upon a genial smile of nature, blight the fair promise of a season of fruit and flowers. The ice hung in long festoons upon the newly-budding trees, the sod was frozen and hard, the sleet came down in one white pitiless sheet, and the sudden change of temperature was a trying ordeal even for those who were housed and comfortable.

But upon the *poor*, especially the improvident poor, the visitation of another wintry spell was an unlooked-for event—the more so because the unusual severity of the weather shut them out from many employments that it was their custom to be engaged in; but though neither help nor advice were withheld by those who had their welfare at heart, the demand for money to supply their necessities was so great that their friends almost despaired, under the new appeals which were made to them for succor, to satisfy even their moderate demands. In answer to one who was interested in their destitute condition, and who applied to Mr. Clayton for a mite from his overflowing treasury, he replied coldly that he had nothing to spare, inasmuch as if he gave to one he

would be obliged to give to all the applicants who daily besieged his doors. Failing to move Clayton's stony heart, and knowing the thousands that he bestowed on useless luxuries, the zealous advocate was not to be discouraged, but sent his wife to the rich man's wife with a touching account of a family in utter poverty, whom she might relieve by a trifling amount spared from her superfluities.

The weather was cold, as I have said, and the day particularly so when the appeal was made. In a luxurious chair, whose downy cushions alone would have imparted warmth to a freezing body, sat Mrs. Clayton, when the friend of the poor was ushered into her presence. A glowing fire burnt upon the hearth, a foot-warmer supported the feet of the dainty lady whose form was wrapped in a superb cashmere robe, lined and doubly lined for warmth, and the cold air was excluded by every contrivance that art and ingenuity could fashion.

She was watching the snow-flakes, as they softly descended, with a dreamy smile upon her face; her eyes were directed towards the window, but her thoughts took a wider range and dwelt upon the future, the coming eventful latter days of Spring, when she trusted that upon her breast, as lightly as laid those feathery flakes upon the earth, a little child would rest as pure as they,—that long-wished-for long-denied gift of God, the secret of her happy mysterious smile.

The door opened and a servant approached and said to her that a lady without desired to see her upon a matter of importance.

"Show her in," said Isabel, quite willing to be amused

or interested by any one ; “bring more coal and keep the fire glowing this freezing day.”

The servant left her and ushered in the humble and conscientious pleader of the poor man’s cause. Well-bred and refined as she evidently was, she could not repress a look of astonishment and curiosity at the luxury around, but soon remembering her errand, she thus stated the case :

“They live,” she said, “this poor family, in the worst hovel ever seen ; nothing but a crazy shutter excludes the cold, and when it rains, the floor, from the dilapidated condition of the roof, is inundated with water. They have no money because the father can obtain no work, and the mother is too ill to think of exerting herself in any way for their maintenance. The worst feature of the case is, that a little child who might be relieved by timely aid—a bright-eyed nursling of only six weeks old—must soon die unless it can obtain the nourishment which the mother is too weak to give it.”

“Ah, then, they have an infant,” said Isabel, showing for the first time an interest in the recital ; “and is it pretty and attractive, and has it sweet winning ways?”

“That I scarcely know,” replied her visitor ; “all that I do know is, that the child is very near death, and we have had so many calls upon us lately, that it is impossible to assist these as effectually as we would like to. Could you not from your abundance spare enough to keep that father from despair, and the mother and child from starvation ?”

Isabel’s heart was touched ; she expected her purse to be plentifully replenished in the evening, when her hus-

band returned, she said, and then would send an abundant supply of money to relieve their necessities.

Her visitor then carefully designated where the donation was to be sent, and was most particular in her directions; a neighbor, she said, as poor almost as they were, who had rendered many a service to the suffering family, would be the recipient of the donation, and lay it out in a judicious way for their comfort. Then calling heaven's blessing upon Isabel's head, with grateful acknowledgments, she departed.

Mrs. Clayton passed the remainder of the morning absorbed in a new novel, and forgot, in imaginary griefs, the real ones of which she had heard, when the dinner hour arrived and her husband returned. He shook the feathery flakes of snow from his dress in a playful manner, and looked as though he had enjoyed the frore air without, so well had he been protected by furs and the warmest garments against its severity. His spirits were high, too, and he entertained Isabel with an account of that day's glorious achievements, in which he had outwitted two sharp business men, and had come off victorious with several extra hundreds. The dinner passed cheerfully; then came Isabel's *siesta*, an hour of deep and uninterrupted repose, almost always necessary because of her late hours and evenings of excitement. On this afternoon, too, she had especial need of rest, in order to be able, with refreshed spirits, to attend a grand festival which had occupied her thoughts for many days, a fancy ball, in which she was to appear in the character of *Night*.

Her sleep was long and refreshing, and her first thought on awaking was to make arrangements for

arraying herself for the long-talked-of, long-anticipated ball, in a toilet which, though exquisite in its simplicity, was remarkable for its richness and perfect taste.

Her robe consisted of black velvet of the softest and most silky texture, relieved on the bosom by a fall of the most elaborate lace which art could manufacture or money purchase. Her hair was combed plainly over her brow, and above its glossy smoothness rose a tiara of diamonds in the form of a crescent, from which descended a black veil almost reaching to the feet, and which, together with her dress, was literally studded with small stars composed of the same precious stones. Upon her arms and neck were glittering bracelets and a necklace of jet and diamonds, and never had Isabel so well deserved the epithet, "beautiful," as she did on this night, when she stood before Clayton in her imposing and radiant costume.

"You are magnificent," said Clayton as she flashed upon his sight in all her brilliant loveliness, "even the gorgeous Night will find a rival in you this evening."

"I knew that you would like me," she said with a smile of gratified vanity, "my mirror told me that you would approve of my dress and me, and now, Clayton, tell me if I am not right in thinking that you would not love me half so well if I were simply attired as a village country girl?"

"That is not a hard question for me to answer," he replied, "but still one that I could not merely dismiss with a 'yes,' or 'no.' I could not love anything that I was not proud of, and Robert Clayton's wife is most loved when he is most proud of her."



"And are you proud of me *to-night*?" she returned with pretty coquetry.

"What a question to ask when you know that you are peerless, and when I have told you that the Night herself, the inspiration of song, the beloved of the poets, will look at you with envy through her ten thousand starry eyes."

Isabel was satisfied; she knew her power, she mistrusted not her fascination, but there was a yearning in her heart to assure herself that the mere externals were not what Clayton alone prized, a yearning which all women must have who possess that fleeting perishable gift of perfect beauty, so dangerous in more than one sense. Nor is it a satisfying possession; there is a continual struggle to preserve it and to meet the expectations of friends, and when it fades,—as fade it must,—unless a mind is well regulated to bear changes and disappointments, its decline is a positive period of suffering to her who has owned it. Far preferable must be that happy medium state termed "good looking," upon which years make no impression, except in many cases to improve, and where, not cognizant of any great falling off, one feels somewhat of an approach to the happy consciousness of "growing old gracefully."

"Suppose," continued Isabel, "that there had been some mark of defect upon my face, suppose that I did not possess the beauty which you give me credit for, or that my eyes had been blinded like poor Richard's—would you have loved me then as now?"

"Your beauty first enchained me, I confess," said Clayton seriously; "that was to me all potent, and I was fortunate while I felt a willing captive to your

charms and won you for my own, to find you possessed of fine qualities of the heart. I fear that if you had had any of the defects which you have just mentioned, you would not have attracted my admiration, and that alone leads to my love. No, had you been blind or deformed, I would have passed you by as not in or of my world, for I have a dread of anything that is so constituted by nature. An accident, like that of Vernon's, I should view in a different light; when the beauty of one who is dear to you is defaced after you have learned to love him or her, habit is so strong that you are not repulsed but love on,—but this, Isabel, has nothing to do with your question, and I have been led into quite a little oration while the carriage has been in waiting for some time; why agitate such questions, dearest? Be satisfied that you are all that I could wish, and that I love you as devotedly, as exclusively, as even your requiring nature can desire."

In this half-playful, half-serious converse, which they both had reason to remember for many, many years after, passed the half hour that preceded their going to the ball, and amid its brilliant scenes, where Isabel reigned triumphant, *her promise to the friend of the poor was forgotten.*

A late breakfast found them talking over the events of the night before, and as the same lady, whom Isabel had so cordially welcomed the day previous, desired to speak to her for a few minutes, the waiter ushered her in without ceremony as one whose visit would be acceptable.

Isabel received her with a conscious blush, and stammered out some apologies which her visitor did not appear to hear.

"I have come," she said hurriedly, "to inquire about the money which you sent yesterday; unfortunately it did not arrive at its destination, and it must have been taken to the wrong house."

Clayton looked from one to the other for an explanation.

"It is only about a poor and suffering family," said Isabel, "to whom I promised to send some aid."

"I am sorry," said Clayton gravely, "that misguided persons will persist in making their ill-timed applications for assistance here,—and more sorry, that at this time, Isabel, they should worry and distress you by their revolting pictures of the suffering of the poor, who, after all, seem to me to be surrounded by comforts without the trouble of toiling for them. You have promised, however, therefore you must perform; here is sufficient to keep them for some time from starvation, though I think it a superfluous donation, inasmuch as I have to pay enough away to-day in the shape of poor taxes to pave their floors with silver."

Isabel extended her hand to receive the comparatively small donation which her husband handed her.

"Stop, Mrs. Clayton," said her visitor, laying her hand with dignity upon Isabel's; "there is no need of your charity in the case I mentioned, as it would come just twelve hours too late, and your promise did not extend to others. After I left you yesterday, hope sustained the little group I mentioned to you, until the day wore into night, and then it merged into despair, and I learned this morning that after waiting in vain for the assistance which I told them they could depend upon as being sent from you, the husband, maddened by poverty

and want, took refuge in the bottle, and is raving in the delirium of drunkenness; the wife, more shocked at his state than pressed even by hunger and disease, dying—and the little infant whose frail thread of life was only held unbroken by its mother's devotion, far beyond pain and trouble—dead."

"*Dead!*" echoed Isabel. The word rang like a knell in her ear while her lips repeated it again and again. "The little infant dead!"

"Children die daily," said the visitor, unable to refrain from a parting word of reproach, "but scarcely under such circumstances *as these*."

Clayton frowned gloomily, Isabel trembled at the just rebuke, while, conscious of having done her duty, their unwelcome guest passed quietly from the room.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"I see them sitting by each other's side  
In the heart's silent secrecy! I hear  
The breath of meditation from their souls;  
They speak; a soft subduing tenderness  
Born of devotion, innocence, and bliss,  
Steals from their bosoms in a silvery voice  
That makes a pious hymning melody."

JOHN WILSON.

"Life, when he least expected, burst in blossom,  
Music became the measure of his hours,  
His paths were paths of flowers."

HIRST's *Endymion*.

VERNON's daily visits to the Grove, to plan improvements, and to restore the house and grounds to their former completeness, gave him a constancy of occupation which was most beneficial to him. Something like this he needed to take him away from himself and the constantly recurring thought, that the time was fast approaching when he would lose the companionship of Sybil for ever. Books had ceased to entice him, for were they ever so attractive, his thoughts would wander as the most exciting passages were read to him, and the authors whom he most admired had lost their charm. On the other hand, he was acquiring the habit of self-conquest, and felt a certain satisfaction in the consciousness that he was hiding from Linwood and Sybil the

gloom which enveloped his inner life. He had, moreover, made a determination to be more cheerful, and not to come before his friends like a dark shadow of evil, clouding the sunshine of their days; and since it was inevitable that social happiness was not to be his lot, he resolved to make the memory of Sybil's last days in his society pleasant, and therefore upon his return each evening from his visit to the Grove, his brilliant sallies of wit and his inexhaustible fund of entertaining conversation won his guests to new admiration of his talents and varied powers.

It was in a mood somewhat like that which has been described above, with sorrow in his heart but with a song upon his lips, that he entered the little porch at the cottage on the evening of the day which had witnessed the parting between Sybil and Albert.

Sybil had never been told the amount of Vernon's loss by the fire,—indeed any allusion to that fearful night had always seemed to agitate her, and the subject was tacitly avoided; but from the little that she gained from Vernon's conversations with Albert, her impression was that nearly the whole edifice had been destroyed, together with the pictures, works of art, books, and furniture, and she thought if such were the case, Vernon must be almost impoverished. But so little experience had she in anything that related to money transactions, that the estimate she had formed was far from correct. It was true that his loss was quite severe, but fortunately all that had been destroyed could easily be supplied from Vernon's ample fortune.

Laboring under the false impression she had formed, Sybil passed many a restless night before her strength

fully returned in thinking of romantic plans (if he would allow her to remain after she had broken her engagement with Albert), whereby she could assist him, or in case that the luxuries to which he had been accustomed had to be relinquished, how best she could help to make up by her untiring devotion the deprivation he would thus be obliged to endure.

One step had been achieved—Albert had gone—but a new difficulty arose in Sybil's mind as to the manner in which Vernon would receive the intelligence. His song as he entered smote upon her heart, he seemed to be so happy in spite of his misfortunes. She felt as if his very joy was a rebuke to her, and in that gay careless mood dreaded to tell him, if he inquired for Albert, that he had departed from his friend for ever. She feared, too, one of those old terrible outbursts of ungovernable passion which knew no law, and which, even though he had tried to struggle against them so bravely, now and then might burst in fury upon her head.

Sybil was pacing to and fro in the little porch. She could not remain calmly within awaiting Vernon's return; that quick tread which sent the blood coursing through her frame was preferable to sitting and watching the pendulum's lazy motion, or to reading pages which her eyes indeed mechanically followed, though they conveyed to her pre-occupied mind no sense or meaning. At last she heard the sound of horse-hoofs, then Vernon's voice, then his approaching step, and she advanced to meet him, and offered to lead him into the room.

"If you are walking, Sybil, I will join you," said he—"how long it is since we have had a talk about the stars! Tell me something of them as they twinkle out upon

the night,—if your favorite Orion is belted as gorgeously as of yore, and if the lost Pleiad has yet returned to her sisters. Did Sybil ever tell you, Albert, that a blind man taught her the constellations, and how well with his help and the charts she has learned their names? Give her your other arm, for we must not forget that our little flower is still drooping, and not nearly as strong as we hope the fresh Spring air will make her.”

Ah, bravely said were those few cheerful words, and they had a deeper meaning, too, than Sybil imagined, for they referred to the right that Albert had to be her support and guide.

“Albert is not here,” said Sybil, timidly.

“Not here!” said Vernon in astonishment, “why, is the knight a truant, that he must thus leave his lady’s bower? Take comfort, Sybil, he cannot desert you long.”

“*He will never return,*” said Sybil, pausing in her walk and speaking with trembling earnestness, “and he bade me say farewell to you. I told you that I had something to say to you, Mr. Vernon, sooner or later, and now the time has arrived, more especially since you have lost so much, and feel the heavy hand of misfortune upon you. It is true that I have brought one sad thing to pass, Albert’s absence—that was inevitable; but if you will accept my services, me you still can have. I will serve you and toil for you, no exertion will seem too great, no privation too hard to bear, if you will let me stay and be your friend, your sister, even your servant; and should this cottage be your home, I will try to make it pleasant for you, so pleasant that you will miss but very little the lost luxuries of Vernon Grove.”



"And Albert?" questioned Vernon in the only words which he could command himself sufficiently to utter.

"I could not, could not love him," said Sybil passionately, "I tried, until I made myself deceitful; all the long nights I would lie awake, hoping to make the thought of him a thought of love, but in vain. Then your letter came to Mrs. Clayton, and she read words to me from it which sent my heart adrift from Vernon Grove, bidding Albert God speed in his love, and saying that it was your desire that I should be his wife, not only your desire, but almost your command, and then in an evil hour to please you, but *only* to please you, Mr. Vernon, I consented, but since then I have had no peace, none. Something has said to me hourly, 'you are living a lie.' Life has been a burden, and as I could not love him, nor could I ever hope to after all this trying, I told him so to-day. If you are too angry with me to endure me in your presence, only say so, and I will find another home,—even that, though sad enough, would be better than the struggle that has daily and hourly been mine,—but if you can forgive me, weighing all my trials, my needs, my love for you and all that belongs to you, the heart-agony I have endured in the false life which I have told you of, then let your little Sybil stay."

So saying she twined her arm more securely in his and drew nearer to him, as though she knew how hard it would be to thrust one away who, like a frightened timid dove, sought protection in his bosom.

Vernon trembled; a hundred varying emotions passed through his mind, chief among which the thought of Sybil's sufferings and Isabel's duplicity, which he at once

traced to Florence's schemes, was conspicuous. But over all reigned a strange sensation of peace and holy joy, the reality that he had so well counterfeited only a few moments before.

"Poor child," he said, taking her hand with indescribable tenderness of voice and manner, "poor suffering child; and so they made you believe that I would have you wed Albert and leave me to my loneliness; it was all false, some fiendish plot misled you, and some day we shall unravel it all. And would you share my fancied poverty with me, as you said? Is there nothing in the wide world that could part you from me, Sybil?"

"Ah, *nothing*."

"And is there no one whom you have met and would welcome, were he to come to take you from the blind man's hearth?"

"No one in the whole wide world."

The grasp of his hand tightened around Sybil's yielding fingers; his pulses throbbed with a new sense of joy; that moment would have rewarded him for a lifetime of suffering.

"Bless you, Sybil," he said with deep emotion, "now has the sunshine of my life indeed returned, the silver lining of my cloud appeared."

"And will you *never* send me away again?" she asked.

"Send you away, Sybil!" he exclaimed, "*how could I?*" and yet," he added, like one awaking from a sweet dream, "God help me, but I must send you away, God give me strength to do my duty unflinchingly, for I dare not keep you with me any longer. Would you ask me why," he continued, an uncontrollable impulse leading

him on, "I would tell you that I love you, love you with the whole strength of my heart and soul. I never meant to reveal this to you, Sybil, but justice to you and myself requires it now. There is no love in the world like mine, for it has grown with years of the closest intercourse; it is prayerful, because you first taught me to pray; it is forbearing, because you gave me my first lessons in checking the sins of my exacting and imperious nature, and it is enduring because of the very elements which have fostered its growth, and therefore it can never die as common loves die, or seek for another object whereon to rest. Then, loving you thus, how could I bear to think that the time might arrive, ay, let it be a mere probability, when another would come to claim you. I could never be *quite* happy under the uncertainty; day and night, night and day, I should think that my treasure might be taken away, and the thought would bring only wretchedness with it. There *is* a way," he continued after pausing for an instant, "only one way in which I could be happier than ever mortal was when happiest in the world, but I love you too much to say it; it would be wrong in me to wish to appropriate so much loveliness and purity to my darkened life. No, Sybil, leave me ere I so far forget myself and my long cherished resolution as even to whisper it in your ear—tempt me not with your dear presence to utter what might offend you irrevocably, and cause me everlasting regret."

Sybil listened—her life had known no joy like this; she knew that she was dear to him, but not so dear as he had said. She laid her hands trustingly in his and gazing up into his face with a look which he felt and

welcomed even through his blindness, spoke again, in answer, earnest and trembling words.

"Say it," she said solemnly, "whatever way there is to make your happiness, that way will most surely make mine also."

"And you will not be angry or scornful if it offends you, and you will keep your hands in mine still, even thus, and not let our parting be abrupt, but stay with me a little longer, Sybil, and talk on in your own sweet way about the calm eternal stars?"

"Angry and scornful, angry with *you*!" she said, "ah, you little know how to measure a true heart's love."

These words gave him new life; hope unbound the fetters of his tongue and bestowed upon his wild long-hidden wish a voice. It could not be wrong to utter it now, when she, whom it most concerned, urged him on; when, after wealth and love had been laid at her feet she had rejected them to return to him; when it was so plainly his duty to be frank with her own frank nature; under such circumstances any tribunal would absolve him from his vow; the words could not harm her, mere words which she had promised she would not be offended at; and after all, he had himself proposed the worst thing that could befall him, *she could but leave him*, she could not deprive him of the privilege of still loving her memory after she had departed from him for ever.

"Then, Sybil," he said, "I will trust that large generous heart, and rest my cause upon its wide extended love—I can only be happy were you mine, *were you my wife*. Would you, *could you*, be a blind man's wife? Never; let us end this mockery; come."

He turned from her as though to enter the cottage

door, but she stood between him and it, and arrested his steps.

"I *have* come," she said, detaining him, "but not to leave this pleasant porch just yet; stop and listen to me, I have come to tell you that I knew it could be found, the love that would satisfy me, that I would turn from the whole world to guide you, that our love is equal, that I will be your wife, Richard. May I call you Richard *now*?"

With a glad cry of joy he caught her to his breast the wish for sight was stilled; content was he to be in his darkened world, since her voice, with all its wealth of tenderness, whispered to him that he was beloved, and there beneath the stars he told her that he was resigned even to his life-affliction, his blindness.

"Life, when least expected, burst in blossom,  
Music became the measure of his hours,  
His paths were paths of flowers."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Thou lamb in Childhood's field astray!  
Whence camest thou? what angel bore  
Thee past so many a fairer shore  
Of guarding love and guidance mild,  
To drop thee on this barren wild?"

BAYARD TAYLOR.

"Blest Infancy  
That from thy precious shore of hidden wealth,  
Can'st lavish gifts as boundless, when compared  
To the world's hollow pleasures, as a beam  
Is to the mote that flits along its path."

MARY LEE.

So changeable was Isabel's April-like temperament that she was glad to hear of her brother's happiness. She wrote him a long letter making a full confession of her participation in Sybil's engagement to Albert; so touching and contrite was it, she asked for forgiveness so humbly that it was granted at once, and Vernon accepted an invitation which she urged upon him, to come at once to the city, and to be married under Mr. Clayton's roof.

They went, and it is enough for the development of our story to say, without describing Isabel's kindness or Mr. Clayton's welcome, the beauty of the bride's trousseau or the glorious sunshine which marked the happy day, that they were married, and that a benediction from

God was never asked upon more congenial and loving hearts.

Another event of importance was about to transpire at Mr. Clayton's. Isabel's earnest prayer had at last been granted and God had given her the promise of a little child; something to love; an heir to all the wealth so carefully hoarded, except where selfish gratification was concerned; a sunbeam to light up those lonely rooms, a young voice to draw her homeward and to keep her satisfied there.

To Clayton this promise was one of extraordinary moment, and his pride and joy showed itself in increased tenderness towards Isabel and in extravagant preparations for the little stranger. What wealth could buy was to be laid at its feet—the finest lawns would scarcely be soft enough to enfold its delicate limbs, and the laces and embroideries ordered for its wardrobe were curiosities in themselves from their richness and costliness. Then its eyes were to open upon everything fair and exquisite, and as it grew to years all that was beautiful in art and nature was to minister in its tastes. Gorgeous canopies threaded with gold hung over the elaborate cradle, and precious salvers and vases stood ready for the infant's use. Nor was he content with merely providing for the present wants of the child, but a so-called "nursery" was fitted up with an extravagance which was almost sinful. Rare pictures which a child might understand, stories told by skilful artists' hands, lined the walls; curious toys lay strewn about like the *bijouterie* in a drawing-room; silver and gold were manufactured into playthings, and musical instruments mimicked with exquisite skill and precision into minia-

ture toys. So talked of was this extraordinary outlay of money, this unusual prodigality, that it was considered a privilege among the friends of the Claytons' circle to gain admittance to this room, set apart from all others, in order to boast of having seen the rare curiosities it contained.

At length the day and the hour arrived, and the promise of the Spring, a child, lay slumbering upon its mother's breast,—

“With her hands, soft, white, and slender,  
And her red lips full and tender,  
And her breathing, like the motion  
Which the waves of calmest ocean  
In their peaceful throbings keep.”

There was stillness in the household, but how different from the silence of a house that death has visited! Every footfall was noiseless, but every lip was smiling; every voice whispered, but each whisper was a note of joy.

Robert Clayton hung over his new-born treasure and his lovely wife with a heart filled with pride and gratitude. His worship of the beautiful was never more fully called out than then, for the mother and child were perfect in form and feature. Nor was he disappointed in the sex of the infant, for Isabel had most wished for a little girl to be her companion in the long hours when he was absent, and moreover there was something akin to royalty in the idea of giving away a *daughter* who could boast of the wealth of princes.

As day by day passed, the child grew in beauty; a serene patient face was hers, with the calm loveliness which we see upon the face of the infant Samuel.



Isabel's countenance was like the day, radiant, brilliant, and smiling; with a light upon it not borrowed from without, but which emanated from a heart ever carelessly happy;—the child's resembled moonlight rather, with its deep, solemn shadows, its unfathomable mysteries, a face leaving in the mind a memory which vibrated between a smile and a sigh.

Time unrolled his mystic scroll of hours, and still the infant developed beneath her parents' fond and watchful eyes. First came the realizing sense that she was startled by sounds, next, that her hearing was singularly acute, that she was sensitive to the slightest touch, and that her lungs were strong and powerful. Each new unfolding of that young and wonderful life, each leaf opening in the curious mechanism of that living flower, was a source of inexpressible joy and interest to Clayton and Isabel. Sometimes they hung over her as she lay sleeping, weaving plans for her future in whispers, for fear that a louder tone might awake her peaceful slumbers, or commenting upon her features, her soft wavy hair, or the dimples that covered

“Those crossed hands upon her breast,”

those tiny hands, crossed unconsciously, as though in prayer.

And yet with still more tenderness when she awoke did they guard their little treasure from evils real and imaginary, from a ray of light let unguardedly into the room, from a draught of air, or a sudden and unexpected noise.

Vernon's old friend and physician, Dr. Bailey, was in close attendance upon Isabel and her child, and her manner

to him was softened when compared with the haughty careless air with which she had met him at the door of her brother's room and heard the intelligence of his doom of perpetual blindness. She had learned to be accustomed to his brusque yet honest manner ; each day, too, he appeared to her more gentle and considerate, and more-over intensely interested in the new-born babe, while his step, which was once like the footfall of a giant, was now echoless, and his voice tenderer to her, it seemed, in his daily inquiries concerning the infant and herself. But Isabel might have been mistaken in the new opinion which she was forming concerning her rough but skilful physician, for all the world was bright to her now, and every one in it a miracle of perfection, so surely does happiness color the atmosphere of those who look at life through its medium.

It is true, however, that Dr. Bailey showed a peculiar interest in the infant under his charge, more perhaps than was needed in the case of one who, in sick-room phrase, was "doing well." It was true, too, that one day after hanging over it in silence for some time, and when he had taken his departure and had descended one flight of stairs, he turned as though to retrace his steps, pausing irresolutely while a strange expression of indecision passed over his face. Then it could not have been doubted, had any one heard them, that the words which he uttered related to the group he had just left. Full of mystery they were, and yet they were said by one who despised mystery, and prided himself upon ever speaking the naked truth :

"Not yet, they cannot bear it yet, and perhaps after all I may be in the wrong."

But the next day decided Dr. Bailey not to withhold the communication, whatever it might be, from Robert Clayton and his wife.

"Nurse, bring the child hither," said he abruptly, as he stood by a window and unclosed the darkened blinds.

The child was brought just from its morning toilette, fresh as a rain-brightened flower, and as pure, its long embroidered dress sweeping the floor, and soft laces hanging about its tiny form.

Isabel uttered an exclamation of remonstrance :

"Oh, do not take it there," she said, "that bright glare of light has weakened even my strong eyes, and how can her feeble sight bear its glare?"

"It is necessary, Madam," was all the reply the physician vouchsafed.

Then he took the infant in his arms and having sent the nurse away upon some trivial message to his servant, turned from Isabel so that the curtains might intervene between them as she lay anxiously watching him, and gave his whole attention to the child. First he exposed her tender eyes to the bright glare of the morning sun, and peered anxiously down into her face ; then he forced the lids far away from the ball of the eye, until the whole sensitive surface lay exposed, the child screaming in the mean time with pain from his rough and cruel treatment.

*But it was necessary.*

Then a deep shade of anxiety crossed his face. Involuntarily the hard unfeeling man, as Isabel thought him, drew the infant to his breast, uttered some pitying exclamation in a voice as gentle as a woman's, and then returned her to her nurse's arms.

In the evening following that day, Dr. Bailey paid an unexpected and unusual call upon his patient. Hitherto his visits had been before candle-light, but on this occasion it was fully dark.

He was one of those physicians, not uncommon in the class of doctors of medicine, who though first in their profession, sought after and patronized, have none of the drawing-room manners of the more polished members of the fraternity who study sick-room words and phrases, and gild their pills, if possible, while administering them, advising even a dying man, through a trick of courtesy, to hope for life and restoration to health. Dr. Bailey was none of these ; a little more blandness in tone and manner would have improved him—he only thought of his patient and how to cure him ; his step was not always soft and measured, nor his words silvery ; sometimes even the sanctity of the quiet of a sick-room did not prevent him from uttering an expletive so strong that it might have been construed into an oath, and when death was hovering over a patient and waiting for his prey, he told him so, nor cheated him into the belief that the means used merely to soften his passage to the grave, might yet restore him to health once more.

Such was the man who entered Isabel Clayton's chamber, well meaning and skilful, but rough and abrupt in the extreme. He was there to do his duty, and he performed it without calculating how the blow could be made to descend most gently.

A pretty group met his eye as he entered. The happy mother was sitting up, enveloped in cashmeres, and half buried in an easy chair of ponderous dimensions. How lovely she was with that conscious feeling

of importance, the sweet motherly air which showed itself in every movement, the subdued tone of her voice and the chastened expression of her eyes, which were turned ever upon the calm face of her child !

Opposite to her sat Vernon and Sybil, very, very near each other. He loved to feel her breath upon his cheek, he loved to know that she was by his side, now that she was his own, and playfully would tell her, while he clasped her hand within his, that he wished to assure himself of the presence of his good angel lest her sky-sisters, taking advantage of his blindness, might spirit her away.

Close to Isabel, so close that she might watch that her treasure did not fall from his awkward arms, Clayton was seated, holding the child, and speaking to it in a language which was intelligible only to himself ; he was evidently improving in the arts of the nursery, and had actually lulled the infant to sleep with a cradle-like motion and some ambitious attempts at a lullaby, which seemed to be a great source of amusement to the rest of the circle ; while in the distance was the nurse, fast asleep, it is true, but as much alive to the interest of the child as if she were awake and holding her in her arms.

It was not cold, and merely a few embers glowed upon the hearth, as the nurse said, "to take the dampness from the air."

It would be difficult to conceive of a happier group ; there seemed to be no shade in the picture, if we may except Vernon's blindness ; and if life is judged by contrast, it might be said that he was happier far than all !

As we have said, the grouping was one to charm a

looker on ; the sweet domestic quiet, together with the surroundings, the bouquet of rare flowers gracing the stand, the silken draperies, the luxurious lounges, the fair mother, the helpless infant, which told at once why they were thus gathered there ; and Dr. Bailey *should have smiled* when he entered, but he frowned rather, at that light-hearted assemblage. Let us do him the justice to say that he brought the frown with him ; it emanated from his own inward self ; like the reed which bends when it is held over an unseen stream of water, so the frown showed the state of the physician's heart ; any one might have told that it was an index, and that all was not peaceful within.

"A family party ?" asked he, looking around.

"Strictly," said Clayton, smiling,— "where no one but yourself would find a welcome."

"So much the better," growled Dr. Bailey ; "nurse, light the gas."

"We have not lit it *yet*," said Isabel, timidly ; "they tell me that the eyes of infants are very weak."

Dr. Bailey scarcely regarded Isabel's remark, and nodded to the nurse, one of those functionaries who think physicians are commissioned angels, and can never do wrong ; so she obeyed his order forthwith.

Isabel glanced at the infant, who luckily was sleeping, peacefully still, and then shaded her own eyes from the sudden blaze of light, thinking that though the doctor was very cruel, he was doing something which was common and necessary, while Clayton and Sybil drew back, blinded by the sudden accession of light.

"I only needed *this* test before I spoke out," said Dr. Bailey ; "here, give me the child."

Clayton, knowing that he was experienced and skilful, gave up the child, though quite at a loss to imagine what he meant to do. The light was certainly too strong to be let suddenly into that long darkened room, but who would dare to doubt Dr. Bailey's knowledge in almost every branch of his profession! The only individual who seemed to take in a full meaning of what was passing, was, strange to say, Vernon, to whom Sybil was relating what transpired in the scene before her in whispers.

"*Another!*" was all that he said, and Sybil understood too well a few minutes later the significance of the word.

The little head of the sleeping child lay helplessly against the physician's rough coat, encircled by his arm. Suddenly he dashed some cold water that stood near into her face, and she awoke immediately under the bright stream of light.

She did not cry, she did not moan; calmly she looked upward, never flinching, never winking as she lay. Dr. Bailey raised her nearer and nearer to the flame, turned the screw, and let out each burner to its full capacity, passed his hand rapidly to and fro over the child's eyes, then turning towards the wondering group who were slowly understanding the meaning of that fearful pantomime, he laid her once more in her father's arms, and looking into his face said, with a rough voice, though a tear trembled in his eye:

"*Mr. Clayton, your child is blind!*"

The physician departed, and came again and again, but never more did he open the door upon a group so smilingly happy as that which greeted him ere they had

learned the truth which he had come to tell, and which turned the note of gladness into a sorrowful wail of disappointment and despair.

NOTE.—The author of this work deems it necessary to say that the reader will find a striking coincidence between the preceding chapter and one in the recent novel of "John Halifax." It was, however, written long before "John Halifax" was published.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

"I planted in my heart one seed of love,  
Watered with tears and watched with sleepless care;  
It grew, and when I looked that it should prove  
A gracious tree, and blessed harvests bear,  
Blossom nor fruit was there to crown my pain,—  
Tears, cares, and labor, all had been in vain;  
And yet I dare not pluck it from my heart,  
Lest, with the deep struck root my life depart."

*From the Italian.*—MRS. F. K. BUTLER.

MANY years have passed since Sybil first looked upon the calm picture of Evening. She has it near her still, and though surrounded by works of more artistic merit, and paintings executed by those who bear the names of the great, still does this undying memory of her youth combine to shed the steady light of peace around it, a peace, ah, how unlike the life of the self-exiled artist by whom it was executed!

Albert Linwood never expected to find peace, nor did he attempt to look for it; his lot was that of a man who, having one great all-absorbing passion, and being disappointed in its fulfilment and fruition, accepts his destiny as an inheritor of sorrow, and uncomplainingly loves on.

Once Art with him was the chief object of his existence, but now it was only secondary, he used it as a means, not an end, and so far as it helped him some-

what to forget the gloomier points of his fate, so far as it kept him from utter despair, he was grateful to it—no farther.

He had won fame and wealth, and still he wrought mechanically upon the canvass, apparently as though life depended upon his efforts. Men pointed him out to young aspiring artists as an example of perseverance worthy of imitation; women wondered at his cold reserve, which rendered him averse to society, and, avoiding all overtures to a more social life, still he toiled on. His studio was not an object of interest to visitors, for his pictures were always sent to those who had ordered them, as soon as completed; and would the curious endeavor to obtain a glimpse of his studio, nothing would be seen but the absorbed artist, intent upon his last commission, and toiling with feverish impatience to finish it, that he might begin upon another still.

There were hours, however, when his closed doors refused admittance to all—when the past, too strong for him, would come and wrest from him his self-control, and he abandoned himself to thoughts which soothed him in proportion as he could cheat himself by making them real. It was at such times as these, that drawing from a curtained recess an easel, upon which stood an unfinished picture, he would linger over it with touching fondness, occasionally adding a line which his memory recalled, until weariness or hunger called him away from the sweet smiling eyes which seemed almost real in their tender human expression. And this was to him the all of positive pleasure that his life contained.

Italy, where he had taken up his abode, is proverbially a cradle for the world-worn, the weary, the solitary, for

beneath her sunny skies, and in contemplation of her natural and artistic beauties, the restless soul should be rocked, if anywhere upon earth, into calm repose, but Linwood courted its fascinations in vain.

Sometimes in her cypress groves, with clustering vines around him and the vale of the Appenines before him, he forgot for a while his own peculiar sorrow, the sorrow of life-loneliness, in the sweet fancy that she, his Sybil, was by his side; or when roaming above Fiésole, in reality alone, but in thought always accompanied by another, with the sense of the divine influence of the beautiful, as he gazed upon jewelled Florence in the burnished setting of the glistening Arno, he could not separate that delightful emotion from the idea that she likewise, standing by his side, though invisible, shared with him the transient happiness of a joyful feeling.

Men sometimes wondered at the rapt and absent demeanor of the successful artist; he sought no companionships, but seemed to be all sufficient for himself or to carry about with him a presence from which he cared not to be separated, more especially since he was seen one day, when in the Tribune at Florence, while gazing at a beautiful picture, to turn to an imaginary being at his side saying, softly—"Her smile is yours, dear Sybil."

Linwood loved with the soul of an artist, loved as those do upon whom God has written the word, "gifted." As some men prize their gold, their reputation, their honor, Linwood idolized Sybil. She was a part of his life, and failing to obtain such a blessing as her constant presence, he held her sacred in his memory.

But the time came when this ideal existence, this life

of thought must wear out the body upon which it acted. His frame, never a very robust one, and predisposed by his unequal, sedentary habits to weakness, gradually gave way. Slowly came the decline, not even laying him prostrate in the prime of youth, but waiting till middle age ere the final blow was given. His step was not so elastic, nor his hair so richly waving as of yore, when death came softly and took him from his life of dreams, whose romance he carried with him even to the grave.

He had long since finished the mysterious picture, the *Memory* upon which he had so lovingly wrought, and when he found that his fast departing strength made him a prisoner even upon his couch, he had it hung where he might see it ever, and but part with its pitying gaze in death. Linwood knew that he must die, but the change which he saw clearly must come, had no terrors for him. He had lived, he hoped, a good life, perhaps a selfish one as regarded that all-absorbing thought of Sybil, but God would forgive him, he said, for that. He had used much of his wealth to benefit others, particularly poor and struggling artists who were industriously toiling upward, and to Heaven he had committed his soul, thus fulfilling the two chief commandments towards God and his neighbor. Next to God came his devotion to Sybil, to her memory had he dedicated himself, and to do no act upon which her pure eyes could have looked forbiddingly, had been the guiding star of his life.

He was dying, at length; he felt it, he knew it by many signs which he had accustomed himself to look upon calmly, and he sent for persons to whom to intrust

his last wishes. His bequest was a simple one, and soon reached her for whom alone it was intended. It merely said, "As I have lived, so do I die, Sybil's. All that is mine is hers. God keep her. Farewell."

As long as his eyes recognized anything, indeed until they finally closed in death, he requested that the picture which always hung in his sight, should retain its place, and then, when all was over, that it might be forwarded to Vernon Grove with his bequest. This, his last wish, was religiously attended to, and even in the final struggle his eyes were turned lovingly upon it, and his lips still whispered that cherished name.

One evening, some weeks after this event, the inmates of Vernon Grove hung with sorrowing hearts over a package which had just been forwarded to them from Italy, and Vernon knew, ere it was unsealed, that it brought intelligence of his artist friend. No letter had passed between them but one from Vernon, and Linwood's reply. The first was an earnest appeal from Vernon to induce the artist to return and be to himself and Sybil even as a brother. The answer was sorrowful but firm, wishing them every happiness, desiring them to forget his existence, and to leave him to himself in his self-banishment.

Sybil's tears could not be repressed as she read the new testimony of his constancy and thought of the noble and generous heart that lay in its last sleep in a foreign land, and still more was she affected by that picture of herself, which was a masterpiece of painting, and as a likeness truly a *faithful memory*. Nor was Vernon less touched by this instance of the purity and constancy of his friend's attachment to Sybil, and he let

her weep on unrestrained, deeming her tears a fitting tribute to one who had so loved and suffered.

Eventually the picture was placed in a curtained niche as something sacred, a Memory too holy to be exhibited to careless eyes, and even the little children drew the covering reverently aside, and whispered softly to each other that the hand that had painted it was still in death, and that it was so prized and cared for, because the artist who had executed it had lived and died in sorrow alone.

## CHAPTER XXX.

"When first, beloved, in vanished hours  
The blind man sought thy love to gain,  
They said thy cheek was bright as flowers  
New freshened by the summer rain.  
They said thy movements, swift yet soft,  
Were such as make the winged dove  
Seem, as it gently soars aloft,  
The image of repose and love.  
And still beloved, till life grows cold,  
We'll wander 'neath a genial sky,  
And only know that we are old  
By counting happy years gone by :  
For thou to me art still as fair  
As when those happy years began,—  
When first thou cam'st to soothe and share  
The sorrows of a sightless man."

MRS. NORTON.

THE course of our narrative brings us once more to a winter's evening at Vernon Grove. At the time of which we are writing, the building in which Sybil passed her youth was no longer visible, for after the destructive fire that had occurred there, it had been rebuilt with numerous modern improvements, making it the very model of a home whose chief characteristic was its air of luxurious comfort and elegance.

The inmates were sitting before a glowing wood fire, for Vernon loved, since he could not behold the blaze,

to hear the hissing of the sap, the crackling of the dry logs, and the cheerful bustle and activity accompanying the piling on of fresh fuel; he liked to know that the smoke curled up in graceful volumes, and it rejoiced him to listen to the children's prattle as they traced pictures in the changing embers while they brightened or faded, or counted the sparks in busy glee. There was something like busy life in his home fireside, in contrast with the silent steady heat of his sister's hearth, where the unbroken monotony was only interrupted by the harsh unwelcome sound of the crash of coal as the grate was replenished. The first soothed him, the other made him restless and impatient.

"Sybil," said he to his wife, who sat near him, "since this sweet hour has returned to us again, this hour consecrated to heart-converse, tell me, as you do ever at twilight, exactly what is passing around us now; it seems to me that I can better follow you in all your avocations during the remainder of this evening."

She whom he addressed was a lovely impersonation of a happy wife and mother, her brow unshaded by care, and her eyes wearing that beaming look of contentment, which humanity, even with its birthright of sorrow, sometimes, spite of sorrow wears. She was our Sybil of old, save that her form was rounder, and though from her step had departed somewhat of its lightness, the quiet dignity which pervaded every movement made up for that lost grace of extreme youth.

"Would you have me tell the story as usual, in my own way, Richard, or would you prefer the more stately measure of the rounded periods which one sees in print?"



"Tell me it as you choose; I never tire of listening to you."

That earnest tone of truth, though said with the smallest possible degree of gallantry, told at once that all the romance of love still lingered about them, and the soft blush which it brought to Sybil's face indicated plainly that a kind word from him, was still prized beyond anything that the rest of the world might say.

"Well," she answered, "*as the books say*,—It is a cold and stormy night; the rain descends in torrents; the inmates of a certain pleasant home feel neither the rain nor the cold, for God has given them a good shelter. Upon the hearth glows a brilliant fire, illumining without lamp-light, the remotest corner of the apartment. Not that the room is very large, but it is just the size for comfort. A rich carpet, upon which crimson flowers predominate, covers the floor, and crimson curtains shade the windows, shutting out the dreariness of the night, yet not quite shutting in the comfort, for the passer-by, should there be any, would say, how pleasant it must be within. There are sofas, and couches, and lounges enough, and straight-backed chairs for people who are opposed to modern innovations, are scattered about: there is a small bookcase on one side of the room where Grecian sages stand side by side with a questionable looking Mother Goose, and where, lying irreverently upon the back of the immortal Homer's works, reclines a certain unsatisfied Jack Horner bound in indestructible cloth! Then in one corner of the room, upon which are written the invisible letters, '*Sacred to the Children*' are a Noah's ark and a box of ninepins, while in niches opposite are busts of Shakspeare and Dante,

too much regarded as household gods to be sent into banishment in the best parlor. Besides these, there is a round table upon which stand a basket of delicate needlework, a book with a mark between the leaves, and a child's porcelain slate. Near the fire sits a man, a *noble* man forsooth, with a high white brow, upon which intellect is written; his dark hair is mixed with silver, a token that he has met and walked with trouble, yet there is such a look of content upon his face, his form is so unbent, his whole aspect so strikingly superior to that of other men"——

"Sybil, shut your imaginary book at once."

"By no means; let me tell my story without interruption,—so strikingly superior to that of other men, that one wonders *where* and *when* he met with and walked with trouble."

"You forget his blindness."

"No, we, the book-makers do *not* forget his blindness, but if it makes no difference to *him*, it makes none whatever to *us*; we rather are drawn to him *the more*, for this very fact."

Her voice was toned to unutterable tenderness as she said these last words, and Vernon half arose as though to clasp his arms around her, but she playfully told him to be seated, and not interrupt the narrative as it was not nearly completed.

"Just opposite to the last mentioned individual," she continued, "is a woman who loves him, and who loved him even before she knew it herself for years and years. She was fair once they say, and may be so now, but the knowledge of it only affects her as far as it enables her to see with what a gratified look, he, of the easy chair

yonder, hears that she is pleasant to look upon—for she only lives for him and his.”

Again Vernon’s arms were unclasped, while he uttered a beseeching “Come, Sybil,” but again she requested him with a dignity worthy of another Fadladeen to be quiet and hear the conclusion.

“To proceed ;—on the floor, in a very undignified posture, I am sorry to say, with his head turned towards the fire, and holding up a book of pictures to the light, lies the household pet, a boy resembling *him* of the superb presence before mentioned, as a secondary rainbow resembles the first. His marked thirst for knowledge bespeaks an intelligence beyond his years, and gives promise of a distinguished career. As he numbers to-day his third year, he is privileged to retain his recumbent posture, until broken from his dream of distinction by the entrance of his nurse, who will presently appear to put him ingloriously to bed.”

A bright smile which was beautiful to behold flitted over the face of the blind man. He was proud, and justly so, of his boy, whom Sybil had so playfully described.

“Just before the fire,” continued Sybil, “sits Ruth, the daughter of the house, gazing in deep thought into the glowing embers as though she were reading a more interesting story there than that told by her lady mother. Her eyes are blue, the image of the maternal eyes, save that their azure is a thought deeper, but she has her father’s dark wavy hair ; at this moment Ruth is in a reverie so profound, that not even the mention of her name can rouse her from her dreamy state.”

“Of what are you thinking Ruth ?” said Vernon, this time interrupting Sybil unrebuked.

The child, thus aroused, answered, but before we hear the sound of her voice, we, the writer and reader, must pause awhile over her briefly told history.


Ruth Vernon was a thoughtful creature, and being six years older than her little brother, she was the self-constituted guardian of the child. Having no companions but her father and mother, she had learned the trick of dignity, and in their quiet country home was already advanced to offices of trust in the household. Her sober demeanor had early rendered her an acceptable guide to her father, and she would sit for hours listening to the conversation of her parents, with an absorbing interest which seemed strange to those who did not know her peculiar bent of character, and the circumstances in which she had been placed.

There was one being in the world to whose happiness she was almost necessary, and this was the blind child of Robert and Isabel Clayton, and although her parents missed her sadly in her absence, they often sacrificed their own feelings to the comfort of her poor afflicted cousin, and allowed Ruth to make stated visits to the city. From one of these visits she had just returned when Sybil was so playfully describing the inmates of Vernon Grove.

There was a close sympathy between the cousins arising partly from the fact that Ruth understood, from long attendance upon her father, the peculiar habits of the blind, and knew better how to interest and amuse her than any other of her young companions; and Eva soon learned to recognize her step and rushed to meet her when she heard her voice. Another reason, perhaps, for this growing attachment was, that to her to whom

toys were useless, books became doubly dear, and Ruth never wearied of reading volume after volume to the attentive and interested child.

The household at Mr. Clayton's luxurious home is a changed one since last we saw it, each and all feeling the impress of the blind child's gentle and lovely character. God sometimes seems to create mortals who are *almost* sinless from birth, rare instances of inborn goodness as an example for us to copy, and nearly angelic was Eva's patient endurance of her peculiar trials. Isabel's unreflecting and selfish character had become changed under her gentle influence, and she had learned to love her blind child with a passionate fondness which we often see in mothers whose children are deformed or diseased. The gaiety of the outer world was now to her only as a remembered dream, and to devise plans for Eva's amusement, to gaze for hours upon her singular beauty, and to wonder what would be her destiny in the long years of the future, was her sole occupation. Gradually, however, as the child increased in years, the character of Isabel's care became changed. A tutor was employed who devoted himself to Eva in order that she might learn the alphabet of the blind, and every little tale which she read herself or listened to, seemed to the reflecting child to point to some moral which was especially addressed to herself. From this came a longing to be useful, and Isabel was gradually forced to become a party to her plans for clothing and feeding the hungry poor, while Eva never seemed happier than when, with her eyes darkened alike to the beauty of heaven and earth, she visited with her mother the abodes of poverty and wretchedness, until at last the latter became interested herself



in their cause, and learned to minister with judgment to their wants.

When the blow first fell upon Clayton, the terrible truth that the child was blind, that he, the fastidious worshipper of only what was perfect and unblemished in creation, was the victim of so terrible a judgment, he was like one bereft of his senses, cursing his destiny and finding fault even with Providence for this unthought-of affliction. He ordered all the bright and costly preparations which had been made for the child to be taken away; he seldom invited a guest to cross his threshold, and the house was as silent as though in readiness for some funeral rite, while the disappointed man shut himself up in the solitude of his own apartment as though mourning the dead. But such an utter abandonment to selfish grief could not continue for ever,—he merged into the business man, the man of the world once more; walked out with a proud air among his associates, and tried with renewed efforts to live down his terrible affliction. Deeper and deeper he plunged into business, forgetting in the day his peculiar trials, but the night came when he turned to that gloomy home and to the conviction that he *must* remember.

And the child won even *him* at last. God seemed to have sent her as a messenger to soften his heart, to turn him from self-worship, and to teach him to live for others.

As long as the nursery *regime* was in existence, Clayton could easily shun the presence of his child, and he avoided her as a sight which gave him inexpressible pain, so different was she from other children, so helpless and yet so uncomplaining, but when that time had passed,

and when those sweet lips had learned that precious word "father" and the little arms wound themselves caressingly around her mother's neck, while she asked coaxingly to be taken into the absent one's presence, Isabel ventured to bring the unconscious offender into that father's sight.

Clayton was a hard man, wasting none of his sympathies upon objects of compassion, and at first he turned away from that angel-like face, and busying himself with books and papers pretended not to see her pretty ways; but children are obtrusive and persevering, and this child soon learned to know when another was in the room beside that gentle mother, and climbing around his knees or leaning her sweet face against him as she sat at his feet, she at last won him from his books to watch her.

One day,—it was a marked day in that household,—Isabel went from the room where they were, and left Clayton and his child together. Eva, then three years old, and somewhat accustomed to localities, after grouping about in vain for her mother, suddenly turned to Clayton as he sat regarding her simply to see what she would do next, and extending her arms cried out, as if beseeching protection in that one all-prevailing burden of prayer, "*father!*" It was a sound strangely matured for those infant lips, but it had become familiar by being the daily and hourly lesson of her mother. From that instant the man's whole nature turned to love and pity, and raising the little one in his arms, he soothed her with gentle words and caresses until she fell back asleep upon his shoulder.

After that period the father and child were as one. Clayton became a child once more for her sake, and con-

stituted himself her guardian, her companion, her friend. To Isabel, towards whom in the violence of his grief and disappointment he had been cold and unloving, he returned once more to what he had ever been before that episode in their hitherto calm life, and a smile came once more to her lips and color to her faded cheek. No longer endeavoring to find in the excitements of business a compensation for his want of interest in his home, he longed for the day to end which would bring him into the presence of those two who awaited him, and with some fresh contrivance to amuse the helpless one, some new budget of simple books, he met their words of loving welcome.

And thus Clayton felt himself a changed man ; he had another object besides the accumulation of wealth and show, nor was that wealth and show appreciated by those who loved him and whom he loved so tenderly. The one had overcome her passion for display, the other had never seen the brilliant appendages which surrounded her, and it mattered little in her estimation whether glittering jewels clasped her arms and decked her bosom, or if they were unadorned in their own graceful simplicity. Gently was he led on from one act of forbearance to another, and earnestly did he try to hide his faults of character from his child, for she had an ideal in her mind of what he was, and it became his aim to live up to it, and in so trying, it is not to be wondered at that he was successful.


We each have a mission assigned to us in our pilgrimage if we would but view the purposes of life aright, and it was hers to improve his character, simply by the example which unconsciously she set.



Dr. Bailey himself was no oculist, but not long after Eva's birth he brought with him a friend who was one, to pronounce upon the case, and from a few words which he had said, scarcely intended, however, to give her parents hope for any change in the child's condition, Clayton never entirely relinquished the idea that sight might eventually be hers.

"In the course of years when she can nerve herself to bear the trial," said the oculist, "an operation could be performed which might result in giving her sight, but it must necessarily be a very painful one, and she will require a strong will and an unflinching courage in order to be able to endure it, and even then the practitioner may not be successful. Were the child mine, I would almost rather let her remain as she is, than raise hopes which in the end may be crushed with disappointment."

From Clayton's mind, we have said, these words never entirely faded, and Isabel, too timid to dwell upon them for fear of a disappointment in the end, left the whole matter to his responsibility, and as the child grew in years and so early developed great decision of character, Clayton gradually revealed to her the hopes and fears of the oculist. His plan was to let her become accustomed to the idea, to set some fixed time for the trial, and then to leave the result to a higher power. At first Eva shrank from the thought as one too terrible to be endured; the bodily pain which she knew that she must meet and bear frightened her; then gradually as her father had hoped, the anticipation became familiar to her, and when he fondly dwelt upon a brilliant result rather than upon the darker side which the physician had been so careful not to omit, she promised to think



seriously upon the subject, and to let him know when, if ever, she could submit to the trying ordeal.

The little cousins had many an earnest conversation upon the subject, and Eva had solemnly exacted a promise from Ruth that she would be present, if the time should ever arrive, to cheer and comfort her.

Ruth had just entered her ninth and Eva her eleventh year, when the latter felt that to please her father, whom she loved with an all-absorbing devotion, and to set the matter at rest for ever, she would endure for his sake the long-talked-of trial. Now that the time had really arrived, it was astonishing to see how differently different characters were impressed and affected by the thought of a crisis so fraught with pain and uncertainty; they underwent a change which made them strangers to themselves. Thus Isabel, who in contemplation of the event had ever been irresolute and timid, now stood by, ready to answer to any call for assistance, her cheeks pale, indeed, but her whole tone and manner calculated to inspire the blind child with confidence; while Clayton, dreading what he had most advocated, fled away from the scene, far from sight or sound of suffering. And to Eva, who was most concerned, the contemplated operation, as far as outward appearances could be judged, brought no terror,—and her sweet low voice which said simply, “*father, I am ready now,*” betrayed no weak tremor in its utterance. They were simple words enough, but the secret of their calmness lay in the fact that they had been preceded by days and hours of prayer.

Rough Dr. Bailey, softer than usual, held that little head with its glossy waves of hair to keep it steady, but

it trembled far less than he did, for, having watched Eva from her infancy, he had learned to love her, and was intensely interested in the result of the experiment which he had himself advocated. Near Eva, and a very important personage in the group, stood Ruth, true to her promise, holding her cousin's hand, and bidding her take courage, and that all would end well.

"Patience," said the operator softly, "a pang, and half the suffering will be over."

The little hand which held Ruth's was clasped more tightly, and a groan smote upon the listeners' ears. The room reeled with the heroic child, a faintness came over her, but she was soon herself again.

"Would you not rather wait a day or two for the other eye to be operated upon?" said the kind physician; "a week hence or a month will answer."

"No," answered Eva, with quiet self-possession, "let it be done to-day, now; I do not think that I could bear the suspense, and it would *please my father* to know that it was all over."

Love sustained her; another sigh, a groan, and it was finished.

Then came the bandages, the darkened room, the stillness, the repose for one whose nerves, all unstrung by the reaction, needed rest, but often those little cousinly hands were clasped together in a pressure which spoke more love than many words.

The physicians only allowed Clayton to enter Eva's room at intervals, for his presence always excited her, and turned the conversation to that one absorbing topic, the hope, that in the end, she would have her sight; but though almost banished from her companionship,

he thought but of her, and his business life was entirely forgotten in the intense interest with which he awaited the final result. Isabel could scarcely be reconciled to the suffering which Eva had endured, to end, perhaps, in disappointment—she loved her child in her blindness as much as mother *could* love, and did not see the necessity of perchance a fruitless experiment, but still under her restless manner one could see that she, too, looked forward to the finale with trembling anxiety. But even had the termination of that fearful ordeal been what they most dreaded, many a lesson of forbearance had been learned by both in the fortitude displayed by their child, her patience and trust, and her calm resignation to the will of Providence, whatever that will might be.

A look from a physician has often more weight than many words spoken by others, and Ruth first interpreted the expression on the oculist's face which led them to hope for a happy result when the hour of decision arrived. The agitation of the parents was too great for them to remain close to Eva when the final moment of investigation came, and in the little entry which led into Eva's room, they awaited the summons which was to give them joy inexpressible, or a life-long weight of sorrow. They dared not remain within, for fear of disappointment; they dared not be far away, for fear that they might lose the first intelligence that she was blessed with sight.

Slowly, cautiously, the bandages were removed, those little clasped hands still giving each other courage, for Ruth needed it nearly as much as Eva, and her heartbeats could almost be heard in the silence. That earnest face of Ruth's was a study, as the different

emotions of love, pity, fear, and hope crossed it, as shadows flit across the sky, until at last the end came and she saw, as her eyes sought the physician's face, a broad, cheerful, happy smile. Ruth was a heroine, but there were some circumstances under which it would have been impossible for her to control herself,—and this proved one. She thought not of consequences,—she only thought of that unceasing prayer which had been breathed by the household for many weeks, and that it was granted at length.

"She will see, she will see," she exclaimed; "Eva, love, do you hear?"

The physician gave her a stern look as a rebuke for her indiscretion, but it was too late, Eva had fainted.

"Ruth is right," said he to the father and mother who had rushed in at that blessed announcement, "but too abrupt; her cousin and herself are wonderful little women in times of trial and danger, but neither of them are equal to a sudden joy."

We shall not follow the Claytons through Eva's long and tedious recovery; it is enough to say that the lessons that misfortune had taught them were not forgotten when prosperity returned, and that they remembered that living for others was a surer means of happiness than living entirely for themselves.

\* \* \* \* \*

Poor little Ruth!—how long is it since we left her looking dreamily into the fire, with her father's question unanswered—"Well, Ruth, of what are you thinking?"

"Sometimes of Eva, who suffered so much pain and was so patient and good (but of her I told you this morning), and sometimes of other things which hap-

pened at uncle Clayton's. Just then, when you spoke to me, I was thinking of a lady, a tall, beautiful lady, who came sometimes to see us, and whom aunt Isabel called Florence. One day she took me aside, and clasping her arms around me, she looked a long while in my face. At last she said, 'Ruth, did they ever tell you that though your eyes are blue, their expression is very like that of your father's eyes?' "

" 'But he is blind,' I said.

" 'I mean they resemble his as they were years ago,' she said, and then she sighed so sadly that I knew deep down in her heart she had some trouble that gave her pain.

" 'You always come here alone,' I said, 'have you no one to take care of you, no little children waiting for you at home?'

" 'God help me; I have no one—no one!' she said.

"Then she wept bitterly, and though it may have been wrong, I asked her if she was sorry for anything she had done.

" 'God grant that you may never have sorrow like mine,' she said, and then she put me away from her, and left me."

Ere Ruth had entirely finished her simple narration, Sybil despatched her upon some trivial errand from the room.

"You have sent Ruth away, Sybil," said Vernon, rising and approaching her, "will you tell me why, dearest? I was quite interested in her remarks, and would have liked to question her farther."

Sybil was mortal; it is of *hearts* that we are telling, and hers was not above a momentary weakness.

"I feared," she said softly, laying her hand caress upon Vernon's arm, "that if she had said anything ther, your pity might have led you to regret."

"I have, indeed, sometimes *to pity*, but nothing *regret*," he said tenderly. "I have known no sorrow no pang of disappointment, since the tender green creeper ivy mingled its bright foliage with the weather-beaten leaves."

Gently he raised her hands and laid them about her neck until they almost clasped each other, then withdrawing his arms around her, he bent down and kissed her forehead.

We would like to leave them there twining still the ivy to which he had likened them, but in truth we cannot, for there is a little heart in the room throbbing passionately with a feeling of jealousy, without knowing for whom, or why, or wherefore. The pet of the household, with his elbows on the carpet and his chin on his hands, is seriously regarding his parents; then approaching them he attempts to clasp them both in his arms, failing in which, he piteously demands that he, too, might be spared a caress.

His demand being satisfied, our story is ended.

THE END.



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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee who have been appointed to investigate the matter.











